

Series: Unwrapping THE GIFT of Christmas

Christmas THEOLOGY #3

Galatians 4:4-5

Introduction: In his book *Rumors of Another World*, Philip Yancey says there are two ways of looking at the world. "One takes the world apart, while the other seeks to connect and put together."

He goes on to say, "We live in an age that excels at the first and falters at the second." Similarly, I think there two ways of approaching God. One approach takes God apart; I call it the theology of dissection. We make God manageable and measurable. We reduce God to a set of propositions or easy theologies or divine formulas. We fall into the trap of reductionism.

I'm not suggesting that we don't study Scripture, but if we aren't careful, we end up with a God in a box. Or in the words of A.W. Tozer, we end up with a God who can **"never surprise us, never overwhelm us, never astonish us, or transcend us."**

The religious leaders were reductionist theologians. They missed the forest for the trees. They were majoring in minors and minoring in majors. They tried to pigeonhole God, but God doesn't fit in nice, neat categories.

In contrast to the theology of dissection, think about what God says in Isaiah 55:8, **"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."**

Astronomers have discovered galaxies 13.2 billion light years away. That means it takes light, traveling at 186,000 miles per second, more than twelve billion years to reach the outer edges of the known heavens.

God says that's about the distance between his thoughts and our thoughts; we underestimate God by 13.2 billion light years.

Psalm 145:3 says, **"There are no boundaries to His greatness; His greatness no one can fathom."**

Saint Chrysostom said children exhibit an innate sensitivity to mystery, an observation he applied to the Christmas story:

Tell a child the story of Bethlehem, the vigil of the shepherds, the quest of the Magi, the song of the angels and the babe in the manger. He drinks it all in. Tell a child the story of the Cross; he accepts it avidly, finding no difficulty anywhere. Relate to an adult the same impressive facts, and he will ask for a theory of the Atonement.

As Max Lucado says, God announced the birth to shepherds because they "didn't know enough to tell God that angels don't sing to sheep and that Messiahs aren't found wrapped in rags and sleeping in a feed trough."

Mark Nepo says: "Birds don't need ornithologists to fly." Neither does God need theologians to do miracles. Rather, God is looking for people who won't tell him what he can't do—who won't put him in religious boxes. The shepherds took God at face value. When they heard the news, they embraced it with a simple childlike faith.

A few years ago, a story entitled "Santa Claus: from an Engineer's Perspective," illustrates the way we can analyze something to death—literally.

The e-mail explains that there are approximately 378 million Christian children in the world, according to the Population Reference Bureau.

With an average census rate of 3.5 children per household, one can assume there are 108 million homes, presuming there is at least one good child in each. Santa has about 31 hours of Christmas to work with, thanks to the different time zones and the rotation of the earth if he travels east to west.

That means he must make 967.7 visits per second. Santa has around 1/1000th of a second to park the sleigh, climb down the chimney, fill the stockings, distribute the remaining presents under the tree, eat whatever snacks have been left for him, get back up the chimney, jump into the sleigh, and get on to the next house.

If each of these 108 million stops is evenly distributed around the earth, there is

roughly 0.78 miles between households, giving Santa a total trip of 75.5 million miles. This means Santa's sleigh is moving at 650 miles per second—3,000 times the speed of sound.

The payload of the sleigh adds another interesting element. If each child gets nothing more than a medium sized Lego set weighing around two pounds, the sleigh is carrying over 500,000 tons, not counting Santa. Even granting that the flying reindeer could pull ten times the normal weight, the job couldn't be done with nine of them—Santa would need 360,000 of them.

Six hundred thousand tons traveling at 650 miles per second creates enormous air resistance that would heat up the reindeer in much the same way as a spacecraft re-entering the earth's atmosphere. The entire reindeer team would be vaporized within 4.26 thousandths of a second.

Since Santa, is accelerating from a dead stop to 650 miles per second in one-thousandth of a second, he would be subjected to centrifugal forces of 17,500 g's. A 250-pound Santa would be pinned to the back of the sleigh by 4.3 million pounds of force, instantly crushing his bones and organs and reducing him to a blob of pink goo. In other words, if Santa ever existed, he's dead now.

Living in America nobody needs to tell you it is Christmastime. We love to celebrate holidays in America. There are, I believe 11 Federal holidays in the United States. These are calendar dates designated by the U.S. federal government as holidays. On these days non-essential U.S. federal government offices are closed and federal employees are paid for the day off.

Most everybody can tell you why we celebrate these holidays, but if you were to ask someone why we celebrate Christmas Day most people would say, “We celebrate the birth of Jesus.” But if you really understand Christmas, that is not the primary reason we celebrate Christmas. The real reason why we celebrate the birth of Jesus is because of who He was at his birth.

Christmas is not just a day that we celebrate. It is not even just an event we commemorate; Christmas is about a deity that we need to coronate.

Christianity says that that baby boy in Bethlehem had two natures: a human

nature and a divine nature. He was a human baby, but he was also heaven's baby. He was the son of Mary, but he was also the son of God.

I have entitled this year's Christmas Sermon Series, "**Unwrapping THE GIFT of Christmas.**" You could call it Christmas101. Two weeks ago, we talked about Christmas B.C. (History) Last week we talked about Christmas *biology*. Today's message is Christmas *Theology*.

It is one thing to unwrap a Christmas gift, but it is another thing to unwrap THE GIFT of Christmas.

It is the 'who' of Christmas that makes the "what" of Christmas so important and the "why" of Christmas so understandable.

I'm letting you know up front that I'm going to use some big words today. I'll explain the meaning of the words. For instance, take the words, "Christmas theology." You say, "What is "theology"?"

We use similar words like biology. Biology is made up of two Greek words, *logy* which means the study of. We use the word logic in that way. The other Greek word in biology is *bios*, which means life. So, biology is the study of life.

If you take a class in biology, you are studying life. Last week we talked about Christmas biology, the fact that the virgin birth of Jesus was impossible according to science, impossible according to biology, except for the fact that **NOTHING is impossible with God.**

Another word is psychology. *Logy* means the study of. Psychology is the study of the soul, the study of the *psyche*.

Theology is made up of two Greek words. The Greek word, the *logy* part, the study of, and the Greek word *theos*, which is the Greek word for God. Theology is the study of God.

Jesus said in John 17, verse 3, '**Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.**' (NIV)

Turn with me today to the book of Galatians. Again this will be a Christmas message with no talk of a manger, shepherds, wise men, or angels.

Galatians 4:4-5; "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." (NIV) Let's Pray

There is a Western sociological theology of Christmas that most people have.

What comes to mind when you think of Christmas? Let's be honest, most of our memories come from childhood. The anticipation of presents. The absolute thrill of waking up early and running downstairs and seeing the decorated Christmas tree, the floor covered in presents.

Christmas is a time of seeing relatives near and far. Delicious food and goodies. When you're done with dinner you go back to playing with your toys or watching a classic Christmas movie or reruns (unless you're a mom!)

That's the worldly theology of Christmas. I don't want to be a grinch, but even though there is nothing inherently evil about family celebrations, decorations, and gift giving, that is not the biblical theology of Christmas.

The biblical theology of Christmas has nothing to do with those things and everything to do with the incarnation. What is incarnation? It literally it means "God with meat." When God left his throne in heaven, he became human and dwelled among us.

He came to a broken sinful world, lived a perfect life, and died a sinner's death in our behalf. The incarnation is the gateway to the cross.

Recognizing and submitting to the truth of the incarnation should change everything about your life. **The theology of Christmas, incarnation of Jesus is intended to do something in you and should motivate you to live for His glory.**

Jl Packer would say to his students, **"the goal of theology is doxology."**

In other words, the more we learn of God; that knowledge should lead to the worship of God. That's doxology, to glorify. By the way, our last message will be **Christmas Doxology**.

RC Sproul has said that everyone is a theologian. Whether you are a church leader, an adolescent or an atheist you have an opinion about God. And that opinion affects your view of and how you do everything.

If you believe in the existence of God, you are a theist. Somebody says, "I believe that there are a lot of gods." You are a polytheist. If you believe there is one God, then you are a monotheist. If a person doesn't believe there is a God at all, then they are an atheist. Theology is the study of God.

This verse of scripture and this season of the year is the time when we study about the theology of Christmas because Christmas is all about God. I guess the greatest Christmas verse in the Bible is John 3: 16. It says, ***'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'* (NIV)**

My purpose today is to help you understand the theological implications of the birth of Jesus. The first thing you learn about the theology of Christmas in the two verses in Galatians is the chronology of Christmas.

I. The Chronology of Christmas.

There's another **logy**. That's the first part of verse 4; ***'But when the set time had fully come.'* (NIV)** That's chronology. The word time is translated from the Greek work **chronos**. Chronology is the study of the sequence of time.

There was a time sequence involved in the birth of Jesus. Jesus was born when the fullness of the time had come. I'm going to make a statement you need to remember. **God is never early. He is never late. He is always right on time.** Let me say it again. God is never early. He is never late. He is always on time.

That statement will help you the rest of your life. ***'But when the set time had fully come.'* (NIV)** King James says, ***"fullness of the time."*** It means exactly on schedule, precisely as it could have been. When all the things fit perfectly together for His coming, Jesus began to be formed in Mary's womb.

When Jesus was born, it was not an accident. It was an **appointment**. Jesus came exactly when God planned for Him to come.

We talked about this two weeks ago in my message **Christmas History**. Let me summarize it for you. The time was right **prophetically**. That means that all the Old Testament prophecies were now to be fulfilled. The promised Messiah was going to come. I haven't counted them, but bible scholars have said that there are over 300 prophecies about the coming of Jesus in the Bible.

The time was right **culturally**. In terms of the culture of the world at that time, it was the right time. From 356-323 B.C., God brought to power Alexander the Great. As Alexander took his army around the Mediterranean region, he set up cities and libraries for the sole purpose of spreading the Greek culture and language. By the time Rome came to power, Greek was the language of commerce and education.

This influence led to the translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Greek; what scholars today call the Septuagint. Gentiles were then able to become acquainted with the principles of Judaism. So, the scriptures could be read by the common people who prepared the way for the preaching of the Gospel. Later, when the biographies of Jesus and letters of instruction for the early churches were written, they were written in Greek.

The time was right **politically**. The Roman Empire had achieved world domination at that time. Because of that there was economic and political stability. It was known as the *Pax Romana*, the peace of Rome. One of the lasting legacies was a system of roads going to every part of the Empire, hence the saying, "all roads lead to Rome." Along with this unified Empire came unprecedented freedom to move from one Roman province to another. In 400 years of silence, God was preparing for the coming of Christ.

To the Jewish nation, it looked like God had abandoned them. But we can see from our perspective that God was very much at work preparing the world, setting the stage, for His greatest work—the coming of His Son.

The chronology of Christmas means that when Jesus was born, culturally and politically it was ready.

It was the perfect time, **religiously**. All the religions and all the philosophies of the ancient world had burned themselves out. They were like flickering embers in a fire. The hunger in the human heart was so pronounced that the world was ready for the announcement for the Savior to come. **'But when the set time had fully come.'** That is the chronology of Christmas.

Then notice what it says. **'God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, '** The second thing these verses talk about is the Christology of Christmas.

II. The Christology of Christmas.

What does Christology mean? **Logy** means the study of. What's the first part? It is **Christ**. Christology is the study of Christ. That's exactly what these verses are talking about.

It tells us who Jesus is. It tells us who it was that was born in Bethlehem's manger. It tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, had a divine nature and He also had a human nature.

It says, "But, when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son." Notice that. **"God sent forth his Son."** When Jesus was born, God sent forth His Son. If God sent forth His Son to be born, it means that **Jesus existed before He was born. That's called the preexistence of Christ.**

Jesus existed before He was born. He's the eternal Christ. Isaiah 9, verse 6, says, **'For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given.'** He was the eternal Son from all eternity. Jesus Christ was God.

In John's gospel, chapter 1, verses 1-2, it says, **'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2He was with God in the beginning.'** (NIV)

What is the theology of Christmas? It means that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem's manger, it was God coming in human flesh.

Before Jesus was Mary's son, He was God's Son. When it says that God sent forth His Son, the verb that is used means to send out from.

In other words, God sent His Son, Jesus, the eternal Christ. He sent Him out from. And He was born in a manger, because there was no room in the inn. God sent forth His Son. That's His divine nature.

But look at the rest of the verse. **"born of a woman."** The King James says, **"made of a woman."** We're talking theology. **"made of a woman."**

Let me ask you a question. Are you made of a woman? You say, "Well, yes." You're right and yet you're wrong, because that's not the whole story. You and I are made of a woman and a man.

But the Bible never says that about Jesus. It says, He, who had been sent forth, He who existed from all eternity, He who came down and was given as God's Son was made of a woman. Not a woman and a man.

When Adam was brought into existence he was made without a man and without a woman. God formed Adam from the dust of the earth. When you and I came into existence, we were made of a man and a woman.

When Jesus came, He was made of a woman. That's why in Genesis 3:15, God says to the serpent, ***'I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.'*** (KJV)

The seed of a woman, made of a woman. It means that Jesus was fully human, but without a fallen, sinful nature. When Jesus was made of a woman, He was conceived of the virgin Mary because the Bible says in Luke 1 that the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary so that when Jesus was born, He was born of a woman, but He also was born of the Holy Spirit. That is the Christology of Christmas.

Then notice what it says in the rest of verse 4; ***'born under the law.'*** Jesus was born into a Jewish family which means that Jesus Christ placed Himself under the law. In other words, Jesus worshipped on the Sabbath. Jesus tithed and did everything that the law required.

But that's not all. In Galatians 3, verse 13, it says, ***"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone***

who is hung on a pole.” (NIV)

Jesus Christ not only was made under the law in that He fulfilled the law, but He was also made under the law in that He bore the curse of the law.

Christmas theology is that God sent His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to take your place and my place to bear the curse of the law for us.

So, the theology of Christmas includes Chronology, Christology and lastly... I'm getting ready to hit you with an even bigger 'ology,' The fifth verse says, 'to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.' (NIV)

III. The Soteriology of Christmas.

Logy is the study of. The Greek word for Savior is **soter**. The Greek word for salvation is **soterios**. So, soteriology is the study of salvation. That's just a big, fancy, theological word for what happens when someone accepts Jesus as their Lord and Savior. They receive salvation and are born again.

When you study Christmas, you're studying salvation. When you study salvation, you're talking about soteriology.

That's what this fifth verse is. **"To redeem them."** The word redemption is a salvation word. Christmas theology means that Jesus came to redeem us.

Redemption means to buy something by the payment of a price. When Jesus went to the cross of Calvary, He shed His blood to pay the price to set us free from the captivity of the law, from the captivity of our sins. Salvation sets you free. That's why it's wonderful to be saved. You're set free.

Then it says, **'That we might receive the adoption to sonship.'** Adoption in those days was a little different from what adoption is today.

Many Christians don't realize that adoption is one of the key words that the Apostle Paul uses to describe our relationship to God. Adoption is the legal act of permanently placing a child with parents other than the birth parents. The Greek word for adoption in the NT means to place as a son within a family with full family privileges.

In fact, a son who was a natural born son in a family, when he got to the age of 21, went through his adoption. was an official ceremony which meant from that point on this son was entitled to all the benefits and all of the privileges of being a member of the family.

When you get saved, when you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you are adopted into the family of God which means that you are entitled to all the benefits and the privileges of being a member of the family of God. That's what Christmas theology is all about.

When we come to Christ, God sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts to give us new life and the assurance that we are God's children. That same Holy Spirit within us cries out "Abba, Father." The word "Abba" comes from an Aramaic word that little children would use to speak to their fathers in an intimate, personal way. In English you might say "Dad" or "Daddy" or "Papa."

The concept of "full rights" means that no matter how badly we may have messed up our life, there are no second-class children in God's family. God has no stepchildren. We come in as full members of the family with rights and privileges. **Our standing isn't based on our performance. Our standing is based on God's grace.**

Adoption not only gave you a new name and a new family, but it also meant your old life was gone forever. So complete was the transformation that if you were adopted into a new family and you had old debts, now at adoption all those old debts were canceled, wiped away forever. An adopted son in Rome was regarded as a new person, entering a brand-new life. Adoption as a believer guarantees every believer that:

- 1) You are a full member of God's family.
- 2) You have full rights and privileges in heaven as a first-born son.
- 3) You have immediate access to God.
- 4) You belong to his family.

5) You bear his name.

6) You have a full share in the inheritance he promises his children.

7) Satan has no claim on you because you are no longer a part of his family.

You are rich now. Don't live like a pauper.

You have the Holy Spirit. Don't live in the flesh.

You have access to God, so you have not because you ask not.

You have brothers and sisters that love you.

You have spiritual gifts.

You have been set free from Satan's power.

CLOSING: Just two months after retiring from Southern Evangelical Seminary, Normal Geisler died, July 1, 2019, at the age of eighty-six. He had taught on the college or graduate level for over fifty years and authored or co-authored over a hundred books. One of the great statements he made was:

“I cast my lot - not the one who claimed wisdom, Confucius; or the one claimed enlightenment, Buddha; or the one who claimed to be a prophet, Mohammed, but with the one who claimed to be God in human flesh. The one who declared before man was, I am and proved it.”

If you really want Christmas to mean what God intended for it to mean, then unwrap THE GIFT of Christmas and personally invite Jesus into your heart and into your life and live fully and passionately for Him.