

***But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.***

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Back in the rock and roll era, a band known as *The Byrds* had a hit song entitled, *Turn, Turn, Turn*. Christians should be familiar with the fact that the words of that song were written long before Rock and Roll—in fact, they were written even before the birth of Christ. They were the words of Solomon in the book of Ecclesiastes who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells us: ***For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.*** (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 - ESV)

Tonight we come together because it is time for Christmas. We want this to be a time of joy and celebration as we remember the wonder of this night and what it means for us. Children have waited for this night with growing impatience, and every child knows that this is really the longest night of the year, as time seems to drag by until tomorrow morning, and the opportunity to finally unwrap all the gifts that we receive.

Yes, there is a time for everything—and we think of Christmas as the time for all those things we have talked about tonight and more: a time for family; a time for celebrating; a time for gift-giving; a time for sending greetings to absent friends and family. Sadly, for some people, Christmas is also the one time of the year that they truly think of God—that one time when they actually make it to church.

God wants this Christmas to be the time of your life. That doesn't mean that He simply wants you to have the best Christmas celebration that you've ever had. God wants Christmas to be the time of your life as you know and believe what He has done for you in giving you His Son, our dear Saviour, Jesus Christ. He wants you to know how His love and grace can make every day a day filled with blessings that the world cannot begin to comprehend. He wants you to know what Paul tells us: ***when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.***

The eternal God comes into time to redeem our time. He came to fix the mess that mankind in its sinfulness has made of God's creation since the beginning of time. I am Trekkie—a great fan of all things Star Trek. One of the plot lines that often shows up involves time warps and time travel. In the Star Trek universe there is something known as "the temporal prime directive". According to this directive, nothing shall ever be done by those who travel in time that can affect the time line, because even the most insignificant event in time can have great repercussions throughout all future history. Yet one of the plots that has been played out in every reincarnation of the Star Trek franchise has involved the idea of travelling back into time to fix something that has gone wrong.

In many ways, that is exactly what Christmas is all about. In the miracle of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, time and eternity meet together. The eternal Son, the One through whom all things have been created, who exists in timelessness, who has no beginning and no end, humbly lowers Himself to come into the world of time. He shadows His true divinity to take upon Himself the very flesh and blood of His creation. He who created time and is timeless comes to endure the passing of time. But He comes with a very distinct purpose: He comes to set right all that sin has destroyed in the wonderful world that God created at the beginning of time.

It may seem like an insignificant event to us when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating what typically refer to as "the forbidden fruit". But by doing what God had forbidden, they sinned. And sin has changed everything. They also passed that sin on to their descendants—and that includes you and me. We sin by doing those things that God has forbidden. We sin when

our selfishness rules our hearts or when our indifference to the needs of others keeps us from loving one another as God has first loved us. We sin when we live as if we are all important, and when we forget the God who is the source of all life; the God in whom *we live and move and have our being*' (Acts 17:28 - ESV) We sin in countless ways, adding to the problems of this world, and creating more problems in our own lives.

We can't fix the things that are wrong because of sin. But God can—and He does set them right, as Christ comes to give us the time of our life through His birth among us. As our text says: *when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.* Jesus is born to save us. He comes to redeem us, to buy us back from the power that sin, death and the devil have over us, as He gives Himself in our place. He comes to take all of our sinfulness into His own holy life, and to bear the punishment we deserve as He gives His life for us on the cross. He will die in pain and sorrow, so that by His death the cost of all that we have messed up during our life-time can be forgiven, and in that forgiveness of God be set right again. He dies—but thanks be to God! He also rose again from the dead, promising us: *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."* (John 11:25-26 - ESV)

It is in Jesus Christ that Christmas can truly be the time of our lives. And I don't mean just tonight, or even during this week. It can be the time of our lives for each and every day and for all eternity. When we look at the world around us, we see that we are living in troubled times. Our economy is in the tank, and so many are unemployed. There has been a fair bit of violence in our community—shootings, domestic violence, crime—and it can make us feel unsafe. We think of those far from home—especially those serving in the armed forces of this nation, and we realize that the world is a place of strife, hatred and war. There are those who are home sick this evening, and perhaps we wonder when the next flu pandemic is going to come. There are those who have lost loved ones and are grieving rather than celebrating. And there are many others who aren't enjoying Christmas, for whom Christmas has always been more of a struggle than a celebration. If this is the reality of the times, what does the future have in store?

If it were not for the miracle of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, and of all that He did for us as He lived, died and rose for us, then the time to come would be very, very bleak. Without Christ, sin's power over us would mean eternal death in hell—and that is not a very appealing prospect. But everything changes tonight. Christ did come. He did redeem the time. He gives us His Holy Spirit so that we may know and believe in Him—and through that faith we are the children of God, adopted into His family because of His love for us. God is our father. We can call Him *Abba*, a term that refers to the close, loving relationship that a child would have with his father. For us, the closest equivalent would be that we can call God, 'dad'. And our dad brings us together to rejoice in the wonder of all He has done that we might live in His kingdom forever.

Christ came to bring you into God's family of life and celebration. He comes to us so that Christmas may truly be the time of our life. But that time isn't only about tonight. There is, indeed, a time for every purpose under heaven, but tonight isn't the only time for us to live in the light of Christ's love. Christmas truly becomes the time of our life when we live each and every day under His gracious care. Christmas becomes the time of our life when we take the hope of this night and keep it with us throughout the year. Christmas is the time of our life when we come to be fed and strengthened by our Father through regular worship and the study of His Word. It is the time of our life when we are led by the Spirit in a life of faith that knows what it means to have God as our Father, our Brother and our Comforter; a life that knows what it is to be a child of God.

When Jesus Christ, the Eternal Son of God is not merely part of our Christmas tradition and when our trust in Christ isn't simply about remembering His birthday, then we find the blessings that make this night the time of our life and of our eternity. We find, in the blessings of Almighty God, the help we need for our lives in this world. We find the peace that extends through all the time of life in this world. Best of all, we know that we will have the inheritance that God gives to His children—that glorious life of eternal joy that will come when time itself has come to an end. May God grant you His grace so that you may truly believe and live in the power of all that Christ has done for you, and have the time of your life, both now and forever. Amen.