

The Gift Worth Waiting For Luke 2:1-7

With our attention on celebrating Christmas we consider *The Gift Worth Waiting For*. We focus our attention on Luke's birth narrative of Jesus Christ.

Luke 2:1) In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the whole empire should be registered. 2) This first registration took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3) So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. 4) Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David, 5) to be registered along with Mary, who was engaged to him and was pregnant. 6) While they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7) Then she gave birth to her firstborn son, and she wrapped him tightly in cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

The Most Difficult Emotions of Christmas: Anticipation and Waiting. When we are children, we can hardly wait for Christmas to get here. We nervously anticipate the gifts under the Christmas tree with our name on them. As the days and hours count down before December 25th, our expectation increases. And then comes that morning when no matter how late we've been up on Christmas Eve, we awaken early with the thrill of rushing to the tree and tearing open those gifts. But my parents made us wait until they were up. My parents threatened us. Imagine that! It's Christmas, and they would say to us as they put us to bed on Christmas Eve, *"Now if you wake up before we do, don't you come out of that room. You stay your room until we tell you we're ready."* My father had this 8mm movie camera with four bright lights attached. They looked like reindeer antlers with spotlights. My sister and I would wake up early, and wait, and wait, and wait. Finally my mom would say, *"O.K. We're ready."* And she'd want us to come into the living room, walking together, rubbing our eyes as if we'd just awakened. Dad would say from behind the camera and the lights, *"Look here. Aren't you surprised?"* And I'd smile, but think, *"This is terrible. We've been awake waiting for you to get everything ready. Heck no, I'm not surprised. I'm mad at you for making us wait."* So one year, I just couldn't take it anymore. When I heard the word *"Ready"*, I took off running – I left my sister eating my dust. I burst into the living room, ran toward the tree, dropped to my knees, slid into the presents and began to tear open my presents. I didn't even look at the camera. I just didn't care anymore. Anticipation and waiting – the most difficult emotions of Christmas.

The Apostle Paul declared in Romans 6:23 that *"the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ His Son."* Of all the gifts at Christmas, Jesus is THE gift worth waiting for. Luke affirmed that the birth of Jesus was long anticipated – the Jews had been waiting for generations for the Messiah. And then in God's perfect

timing, Jesus was born. As we set our attention of Christmas Day, 2019, let's consider two dimensions of God's perfect timing at Christmas.

1. THE RIGHT TIME FOR THE GIFT. Christmas shouts loudly about God's sovereign timing. King Solomon observed in Ecclesiastes 3: "*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven... God has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men.*" [3:1-8, 11] That's an amazing statement. God created everything appropriate in its time – and only God can insert eternity in our hearts. God not only knows everything and is in control of everything, but God's timing resounds an eternal perspective.

- **Jesus' birth - the right time politically.** In the century before Jesus' birth, Julius Caesar ruled the Roman empire. Civil war and regional conflict erupted during his reign. But Julius Caesar was assassinated 25 years before Jesus' birth, and Caesar Augustus, Julius Caesar's great-nephew whom he adopted as his son and heir, became the Roman emperor. Augustus instituted the *pax Romana*, meaning Roman peace, which provided economic and political stability. Have you ever heard the phrase, "*All roads lead to Rome?*" Under Augustus' reign, the Romans constructed super highways, stretching from Rome to all the known world. During Jesus' earthly ministry, He and His disciples could travel the roads of Israel and Judea. After Jesus' departure from Earth, the first century Christians could fulfill the Acts 1:8 challenge to declare the Gospel from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the outreaches of the Mediterranean world. Was this era of political peace coincidence or did Jesus' birth occur at the right time politically?

- **Jesus' birth = the right time culturally.** For the first time since the tower of Babel, during the time of Jesus' birth, one common language was spoken. Remember that tower in Genesis 11? The descendants of Noah desired to make a name for themselves and customize their spoken language by building a city and constructing a tower that would reach into the sky. God looked down from heaven and rejected their motives. According to Genesis 11:9, "*the Lord confused the language of the whole earth, and from there the Lord scattered them throughout the earth.*" From that until the time of Jesus' birth, all people groups spoke different languages. But at the time of Jesus' birth, because of the efforts of Alexander the Great, everyone in the Mediterranean world spoke Greek. The New Testament is written in Greek, because that was the common language. That wouldn't even be true today. If the New Testament was written today, the letters to the Galatians and Ephesians would be in Turkish, the letters to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians would be in Greek, and the letter to the Romans in Italian. Was it coincidence or God's timing?

- **Jesus' birth = the right time educationally.** The Romans constructed universities during this *pax Romana*. Scholars travelled to these universities to give lectures in the Mediterranean cities. In the book of Acts, when persecution scattered the first Christians from their Jerusalem beginnings, the entire Roman world remained an open door for missionaries like the Apostle Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and Timothy to spread the Gospel, the good news of Jesus. Was this just a sign of the times, or was Jesus' birth the right time educationally?

- **Jesus' birth = the right time religiously.** For the first time in their national history, Israel had forsaken all idolatry and worshiped only Jehovah God. By the time of Jesus' birth, the Old Testament had been completed, assembled by Ezra and the scribes after the Babylonian captivity, so that in every synagogue and Jewish school, not only was Jehovah God worshiped, but the prophecies about the Messiah were taught. Some would say that is coincidence. But God's timing was right!

Each of these factors, in some unique way, offer a key to the spread of the Christian message. God's timing was perfect. Jesus was born when the time was right.

2. THE REVEALED TIME FOR THE GIFT. Jesus' birth fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. The Old Testament revealed significant predictions about the Messiah, all of which focus in the life of Jesus. Of the 123 Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah, we are familiar with six of them at Christmas.

- **The Messiah would arise from the nation of Israel.** Matthew begins his Gospel narrative with these words: *An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.* According to Genesis 12, God called and commissioned Abraham as the patriarch of Israel: *"I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

- **The Messiah would ascend from the tribe of Judah.** According to Genesis 49, Jacob, Abraham's grandson, gathered his 12 sons together and revealed their future. His fourth son, Judah, is told that *"the scepter would never depart from Judah."*

- **The Messiah would come from the family lineage of David.** One thousand years before Jesus' birth, King David desired to build a temple. But God refused, *"No, you're a warrior king – your son Solomon will build the temple."* In David's disappointment, God encouraged him, *"Your house and kingdom will*

endure before me forever, and your throne will be established forever.” – (2 Samuel 7:16)

- **The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.** The prophet Micah prophesied, *“But you Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel.”* (5:2) The tiny town of Bethlehem! Luke’s narrative makes sense: *“So everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. 4) Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family line of David.”*

- **The Messiah would be born of a virgin.** We are all familiar with Isaiah’s prophecy repeated in Matthew 1:23, *“the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name him Immanuel, which is translated ‘God is with us’”*.

- **The Messiah would be visited by magi.** Both Isaiah 60 and Psalm 72 speak of the magi who would visit the Christ child. Matthew chapter 2 acknowledged this visit from the “wise men of the east” who visit Jesus and bring gifts to the king.

Christmas is all about God’s sovereign timing. All of the prophecies of the Messiah come together in Jesus Christ. It was no coincidence that Augustus Caesar called for a census in the entire Roman world. It was no coincidence that everyone had to go to their hometown to register. It was no coincidence that Bethlehem was Joseph’s hometown. It was no coincidence that Mary’s time to deliver her firstborn son occurred as they arrived in Bethlehem for the census. It was no coincidence that while they were in Bethlehem, she gave birth to Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It was all about God’s timing. Jesus could not be born any sooner or any later. It was the right time. It was the revealed time. Jesus is truly the Gift worth waiting for.

Jesus Christ’s birth was not an Accident – it was an Appointment.

Paul captured the gift worth waiting for in Galatians 4:4 – *“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman.”* “The time fully come” refers to the completion of a long period of preparation in God’s sovereign timetable of redemption. What does all of this have to do with us? Simply this – God’s timing is still perfect. If God could so structure the religious and cultural and educational and political climate so that His Son could be born at the perfect time, if God has

so ordered time so that there is a time for everything....If God has set eternity into our hearts....If nothing happens until it's time has fully come.... Then Christmas is all about you and me.

Christmas is all about allowing the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to rule in your life and mine.

Christmas is all about surrendering to God's will and God's way.

Christmas is all about understanding that nothing happens by coincidence, but everything happens by providence.

Christmas is all about God knowing every detail of your life.

Christmas is all about God allowing everything to be appropriate in its time.

God is never early. God is never late. God is always on time.