

## IV God Became Man

Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
born of the Virgin Mary.

*When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born 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 through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir. (Gal. 4:4-7.)*

IF WE TODAY in the midst of a time of world struggle wish to celebrate Christmas properly, then two things dare not happen. First, we dare not let the joy of Christmas be corrupted by thoughts about the horrors of the present time and by anxiety about the still greater ones that may yet come. Then the devil would have gained what he wants. With a Chris-

tianity that has no more joy in its heart he has an easy game. The only thing that he really fears are men who carry the real joy of Christmas in their hearts. For against them he is powerless. All evil thrives only in joylessness. When the evil enemy attacks a man who can truly sing out from his heart:

The Sun that laughs at me  
Is my Lord Jesus Christ;  
What makes me sing  
Is what is in heaven,

then that enemy stands before a fortress against which all his weapons can do nothing. He has to surrender in despair. That is why his tactic always is that he first tries to rob us of this joy. The second thing, however, is just as important: that we are not sucked into an artificial Christmas joy, that so-called Christmas joy which is gone two days after Christmas, which lasts about as long as the candles we burn on the Christmas tree. "One must now forget what kind of evil time it is; it should at least be Christmas today." This Christmas joy belongs in the category "means of intoxication, narcotic." It produces only illusion and disappointment, and leaves the soul empty and weak. Against it the old evil enemy has nothing at all to protest. On the contrary, to him it is all right, for he loves everything that is illusion; all that plays into his hand.

No, dear friends, we wish to have, if I may so express it, a solid Christmas joy, not just a little candlelight with a Christmas-tree fragrance, but a storm lan-

tern that does not go out even when it is blown upon from all sides. And that is why I have chosen for today a text that has nothing at all to do with the poetry of Christmas but is one of the most powerful words of the entire Holy Scriptures because it, as it were, expresses the Christmas joy in the whole context of the message of salvation. That I would like to try to show you with God's help. May he who gave this word to the apostle also make it so sink into our hearts that it will stand fast, invincible, not to be brought down, a truly mighty fortress that is able to ward off all attacks.

“When the time had fully come . . .” How remarkable that still sounds! Time that had fully come! How altogether differently we speak of time! Every man speaks today of an evil time. One would like to be away from it, either back in a more beautiful past or far away in a happier future. It is only the time that is now which one does not like to live through. That is quite humanly understandable, just as a sick person yearns for days when he was well or when he will again be well. This is now the time of humanity's sickness: the body is running a fever and is in pain; it tosses and turns in the dreadful events of the present. But how did we do before with time? Was the time before a time that had fully come? Why, then, these efforts to pass away the time, to forget the lost time, the elapsed time? Why was it and why is it still that so many men complain they have no time? Think once a little about what a role the “too late” or “too

early" has played in your life, or about why it is that the memory of the past is so sad. Time passes and with it our expectations and hopes, unfulfilled, just as buds fall from the trees without having become fruit. Just that seems to be the nature of time, which we all know: that it has not fully come but—just passes away. And now there it sounds like a tone from another world into our world: "When the time had fully come . . ."

Yes, from another world, and yet it means that from our world and from our world time. It was not at all a particularly good time about which the apostle speaks. Had one then said to some Jew, "You, the time has now fully come," he would have looked at him as one looks at a crazy man. What has fully come? Nothing has fully come. The world is full of suffering, anxiety, injustice, death, and sorrow. Because in an obscure corner of the Roman Empire a little child has come into the world—therefore has the time fully come? Are we Jews not the prey of Roman imperialism? Do the nations not groan under the yoke of Roman dictatorship? Do the Roman officials not plunder our land? And if we were to meet this Jew again thirty years later, would he not scornfully call to us: "And now where are you with your time that has fully come? Yesterday he was crucified by the Roman governor, your fulfiller of time, and now things go on the same old miserable way." And since then nineteen hundred years has flown by, with numerous wars; the world empire of Rome has broken up; others have

come and gone. Millions of men have been born and have died. What do you want with your absurd “when the time had fully come”? Time passes away—that is all.

And yet it is true: when the time had fully come, God sent his Son. We cannot see that the time had fully come. But above time God sits on his throne in his eternity and looks upon the world and its time, just as a doctor sits at the bed of a sick person who lies there in fever and knows nothing of the doctor. But the doctor listens carefully to his breathing and takes his pulse and then at a particular moment stands up and calls his nurse and says, “Now is the time; now we shall operate.” And then he performs the saving act. We do not know the time when it is time for God; we are the sick person, not the physician. But God knows the time, our time, which is his time. Time for him to act, to save. When the time had fully come, God sent his Son.

That is why we celebrate Christmas. For we know: at that time the saving act took place. Just why at that time, we do not really understand. But we know what God has done at that time for us, a humanity sick unto death. He has saved us. And the act by which he has done it is the coming of him whom the Bible calls the Son of God. That is, as everything that we say about God, a parable. God has no sons just as men have sons. But this parable expresses a truth that we can never completely grasp. It says: Jesus is he who comes forth from the heart and mystery of God,

yes, who is God himself upon earth, without God having ceased to be in his eternity; he, in whom God himself is with us and wills to be with us, and in whom he himself speaks to us and deals with us; he in whom God himself encounters us and opens his heart, he through whom God has established the relation with himself.

As a true man, he was among us, one of us. That Paul wants to say with the words "born of woman, born under the law." Both are expressions that designate man as a creature, as an ordinary man. That is what can be said of every man and must be said: he is born of woman and born under the law. The apostle does not speak of a virgin either here or anywhere else. He does not want to emphasize what distinguishes Jesus from us, but rather, what makes him like us: birth and law. He was once a little struggling child in swaddling clothes. And he had to learn, had to listen, had to go to school to learn to read and write; had to learn, as every other little Jewish boy, to read the Bible—the Old Testament. He was reared in the custom and religion of his father, perhaps also in his father's vocation as a carpenter. His mother taught him to pray, and he prayed his whole life long. His last word, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" was a prayer. He died, as every man must die, and was buried. He was a man. Thus God wanted to have it; as man, God wanted to come to us men; otherwise he would not really come to us at all. Only a man can we really understand. We do not under-

stand what is less than a man, and we do not understand what is more than a man. But God wanted to be wholly understandable to us, and near. Thus he came as man to us.

But now this "under the law" has still another far-reaching meaning. By law Paul means in Galatians the curse that weighs upon human life on account of its godlessness. Into this curse Jesus came, just as a son comes into the business debts of his father. He himself did not indeed incur the debts, but the debts that men have incurred crush him to death. He came into it, and the curse that lies upon the whole human race on account of its godlessness destroys him. For that reason he had come. He, the innocent one, wanted and had to be destroyed by an evil human inheritance.

See, that belongs to the message of Christmas! There is no Christmas without Good Friday; we will also see that there is no Good Friday without Easter and Whitsunday. That is the most powerful thing about this Christmas text, that it unites Christmas with Good Friday, Easter, and Whitsunday. The incarnation of the Savior is first completed on the cross. For there for the first time it is completely true: he took us upon himself in order to give himself.

Here the apostle speaks of a kind of slave transaction, as if one goes to the slave market, stands before a slave and says to the slavetrader, "Let him go free; I will be the slave in his place;" and then he frees the slave and takes the other who has voluntarily given himself. So Jesus has come under the curse for us, has

borne it for us so that we may become free. That is the real incarnation. On Good Friday it has come about for the first time. So he has become one of our kind, one burdened with slavery, so that we may become those of his kind, free men, God's sons. This difficult basis our Christmas joy has. All the suffering and evil of time is, so to speak, crammed into it. That is why it is no cheap but a very expensive joy. It cost God his Son. God could not make it cheaper. This act was necessary if we should be saved. But the cost of his act he alone has borne.

Again and again we ask, Why? This question one can never finish answering. Yet the answer must be again and again this: Because God could not release us from the curse of sin any other way. Sin is basically only one thing: that we love ourselves instead of loving God and our neighbor. We are so entangled in this self-love that all education, all culture, all morality, and all training cannot release us from it. They become again for us all the means of self-love. God has seen—to say it like a child—that there is only one means to overcome this dreadful self-love of men: his love, which goes so far that he surrenders and sacrifices himself for us. Only this sacrifice is a great enough counterweight to the dreadful weight of our self-love. Only with this sacrifice could he break the curse that lies over us through godlessness. Thus he came to us as man; thus he completely entered into the curse of godlessness and allowed himself to be swallowed up by it—so that we may finally become



free of it. How, then, does that happen? By finally venturing through this deed of divine self-sacrifice to believe in God's love so that we see the greatness of our guilt and yet at the same time no longer despair over it. For without Jesus Christ we do one of two things: either we believe in God's love as something self-evident, without seeing our guilt and repenting of our sin; or we see the guilt of our sin and with nothing but a feeling of guilt do not come to believe in God's love. Both things allow us to remain fixed in our godlessness. Only if we get away from both, from the false carelessness that regards God's love as self-evident and from the melancholy anxiety that despairs of God's love, only then are we free from the curse of sin. That cannot happen otherwise than through the knowledge of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

That is the purpose of the whole incarnation of God's Son, this exchange, that we gave him our curse and he gives us his divine Sonship. Through this redemption which has cost him his life we receive the freedom of God's sons. That is the title of nobility that we receive as a gift. Christ is by nature God's Son, not one who has become but one who is from all eternity. But we are adopted sons, we become sons through this bond, through this act of exchange. But we become sons only through the fact that we on our side sign this bill of sale, just as one completes the sale of a house before a notary public. Through it we say: "I acknowledge it in unspeakable thankfulness

and at the same time in shame and repentance that out of a slave of godlessness, of self-love and of anxiety, I have become through you, Lord Jesus, a free man, a son of God, that which you are from eternity. Your love now belongs to me and your eternal life now belongs to me. No one may dispute that it belongs to me because you have bought it for me through your suffering of death."

See, that is the Christmas joy that has foundation! For where there is such faith, there Christmas and Good Friday are accompanied by Easter and Whitsunday. For not to the one who has died for me on the cross can I speak thus, but only to the one who has been raised from the grave, who sits at the right hand of God. If Jesus has not been raised, then indeed the trade is worth nothing, then indeed it was not God's Son but a mere man who could do nothing for me. But if he is God's Son, then he has also been raised and offers me his eternal life in exchange for the curse under which I live and for the death before which I tremble. But if I can really hear his voice so that the voice of my heart answers him, then to Easter is added Whitsunday, the festival of the Holy Spirit. For he does not speak to me down from heaven but to my heart, here and now; truly indeed in my heart he speaks. He says to me that I am his in eternity, and I on my side may answer with Christmas joy: "Praised be Jesus Christ who is my redeemer." To be God's sons, dear friends, if that is true, then we have a fortress in this world that no devil can overrun. Why,

then, do we Christians sneak so morosely through the world? Why does it no longer radiate from our faces? Why is there so little warmth among us? Why otherwise than because we again and again forget it, again and again do not rightly believe that it is really and literally true: Abba, Father, “no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.” But if we really believe it, and it becomes as true in our hearts as in that of the apostle because it is indeed the same Holy Spirit who says it to him and who says it to us, then we also may know something of the time that had fully come. When this love of God shines in this time which passes away, this evil time, then something of evil times and of the passing away of time disappears, then something flashes up from the other world that can never again be extinguished. And thereupon we then wish to celebrate Christmas in spite of the devil and evil times, and to our God sing songs of praise and thank him that he is so incomprehensibly merciful that he redeems us who have been subject to the law with the life of his own Son so that we may live with him as his free sons in eternity. Amen.