

THE TIME IS RIGHT
Luke 2:1-7

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'Twas the night before Jesus when all through the earth
Every creature was stirring for a savior's new birth.
Christ was on earth, all things were like new.
Now people could see what God wanted to do.
When it's the night before Christmas
From the ground to the sky
God's glory is near, and Jesus comes by.

It's Christmas eve. There's a song in the air. There's a star in the sky. Our bodies may be calling us to sleep, but our souls are shaking us awake. The clocks may reveal the hour, but our spirits are longing for the meaning of the hour. The time is right for a visit from God. The time is right for us to find new life. Will you ponder that truth with me tonight?

THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR A VISIT FROM GOD. *In the fullness of time, God sent his son* (Galatians 4:4). Therein lies the true meaning of Christmas.

In the Bible there are two words for time. One is *chronos*, from which we get the word chronology by which we mark our calendars. Chronos time is the ticking of the clock, the passing of the days, the turning of the years.

Picture a convict in a prison cell, marking the days for release—that is chronos time. Remember the nights you couldn't sleep even by counting sheep and every second seemed like an hour—that is chronos time. Somebody here tonight is already checking their watch wondering when this will be over—that is chronos time.

The other word for time is *kairos*—Kairos time is expectant time, pregnant time, a moment when great things are about to happen.

See a mother in her ninth month of pregnancy anxious to deliver her baby—that is kairos time. Picture a child asking the 1000th time, can we open presents yet—that is kairos time. Watch a person captured by a dream striving to turn that dream into a reality—that is kairos time.

In a Kairos moment God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. So the story begins: *"In those days there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that a census should be taken for the entire Roman world."* Not once upon a time, but in a specific time and a particular place Christ the Savior was born.

At a time when 10,000 Roman laborers had built a vast system of roads, some of which are still used today, Christ the Savior was born. At a time when, thanks to Alexander the Great, the Greek language and Greek culture provided cohesion to a once divided world, Christ the Savior was born. At a time when old mythological gods were losing their hold and the hearts and minds of people were hungry for the true God, Christ the Savior was born.

If you are a mechanic, a musician, or a big muscled lineman on a football team, you know the importance of timing. In fact, we all appreciate people who manage to show up on time, do we not?

One of my most embarrassing moments in ministry came last year when I thought a wedding started at 4 p.m. but was actually scheduled at 2. The voice of our wedding coordinator was calm, but convincing, when she reached me on the phone and said, “Dr. Olds, you have a wedding that starts in exactly three minutes.” Having just stepped out of the shower, I am still not sure how I got to the church so fast.

I may forget. God does not forget. I may procrastinate. God keeps his promises. God is on time every time. You can count on that.

You, beneath life's crushing loads
Whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way,
With painful steps and slow.
Look now! For glad and golden hours
Come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
And hear the angels sing.

The time is right for a visit from God tonight.

THE TIME IS RIGHT FOR YOU TO HAVE NEW LIFE.

Listen to this reflection of the early Christian church on this Christmas eve event. *In the fullness of time God came to adopt us as children so that we are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God* (Galatians 4:4,7). God has come to give you the very best Christmas gift ever—an identity and an inheritance. Don't go home without it. They are yours. Just unwrap them; take them for yourself.

You have an identity as a child of God.

The most important person in our household this Christmas is our grandson, Caleb. Caleb's father is the pastor of a struggling church, so the children's workers in that church were delighted to have a child for the Christmas play. In fact, they came to him a few weeks ago and tried casting him for the pageant.

“Caleb, would you like to be a shepherd?” In disgust Caleb replied, “I’m not a shepherd, I’m Caleb.” “Would you be a wise man?” “No,” said Caleb. “I am not a wise man.” “We would even let you be baby Jesus,” said the children’s worker, sensing the difficulty of the preacher’s kid. “Look,” said Caleb, stretching to the full stature of his three-year-old identity, “I’m no baby. I am a big boy. I want to be Caleb.” So last Sunday night at the annual Christmas play there were Mary and Joseph, some wise men and a few shepherds along with Caleb being himself at the manger. I must say he is a child after my own heart.

Christ came that we could be ourselves at Christmas. There is no need to pretend. Forget about fabrications; surrender all simulations. You are not an imposter. You are a child of God. You can call the Lord of the Universe Abba or Daddy. The best thing you could do tonight is remember who you are.

You are not a slave, you are a child. God’s love for you is greater than your slavery to alcohol, drugs, sex, work, pornography, hedonism, materialism, or anything else that separates you from your true self. God’s love for you is greater than all that.

Ben Walker Hooper was Governor of Tennessee from 1911-1915. Born over in Gatlinburg to an unwed mother, Ben knew the pain of never knowing his father. Even worse, Ben endured the ridicule of his peers who constantly asked him, “Who is your daddy?” The pain was so devastating that Ben spent most of his time alone. Then one day a new preacher came to town. Come Sunday, Ben, now 12 years old, went to church. Meeting the boy at the close of the service the preacher fell into the familiar trap by asking Ben “Son, who is your daddy?”

Ben’s face turned red. The crowd grew quiet. Intuitively sensing the pain of the moment, the Pastor hastened to say “Wait a minute, I know who you are. You are a child of God. You are the Lord’s boy. You have a great inheritance. Go out and claim your identity and live into it.” That day Ben discovered he was somebody in the sight of God.

I need to say to someone here tonight, you are Abba’s child. Before you were born God knitted you together in your mother’s womb. He has carved you on the palm of his hand and called you by name. Every hair of your head is numbered and nothing in all creation will ever separate you from God’s unconditional, unmerited, unearned love of God. Remember who you are. Because you are who you are, claim your inheritance. If then I am a child, then I must be an heir, an heir of God. You are not a slave. You are a child. Claim your identity.

A letter from the Health and Human Services of Greenville, South Carolina to a resident went something like this: Your food stamps will be stopped effective March 1, because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you. P.S. You may reapply should your circumstances change.

When we who were once dead in trespasses and sin find new life in Christ we can

do more than re-apply for food stamps. All the riches of God's glory are ours for the asking. All the joys of heaven are yours for Christmas. As the prodigal father says to his stubborn son, "All that I have is yours." All we have needed God's hand has provided. Blessings are ours, with 10,000 besides. Claim your inheritance. It's yours, God wants you to have it.

When our son Brad was little he liked to play at the church. It had a small gym and the parsonage was next door, so it seemed only natural for him to ride his big wheel and pursue his fantasies in halls and in the stairways of that facility. Besides I spent most of my time there, so an adult was usually present. One day the custodian found him in the building and told him to go home since he had no business being there. The whole thing didn't set well with Brad who had other plans on his mind so he said to the custodian, "Mrs. King, this is my daddy's church. My daddy says I can play over here anytime I want to and furthermore, he's your boss." Now, we had to have a little talk about that but the spirit of it I understood. He belonged to the place.

You belong to the family of God. There are certain rights and privileges that come to children of God. This is Christmas eve, maybe it's time to claim them.

You are a person of worth and value
You are loved with an everlasting love
You are entitled to life in all its fullness
You are assured of heaven as home.

So why not have the time of your life this Christmas Eve?
For when it's the night before Christmas
From the ground to the sky
God's glory is near, and Jesus comes by.

