

# The Fullness of Time

Genesis 1:1-4; John 1:1-14; Galatians 4:4-7

Lethbridge Mennonite Church

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Our Christmas Eve service this year was written by our very own Linda Peters and she gave it the name “Overwhelming Joy.”

She thought—and I think, and I suspect many of you who are watching also think—that this year, of all years, we could use a focus on joy as we draw near to the manger.

Christmas is indeed a time for joy. I want to reflect briefly on those two words. Time and joy.

Time.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness (Genesis 1:1-4).

The first words of the Hebrew Bible, the book of Genesis. The opening lines of the vast drama of salvation. The first words of creation being spoken into being.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it...

The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of

God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:1-5; 9-14).

The first words of the gospel according to John, the story of the good news of God entering the story and taking on human flesh. The first words of new creation being spoken into being through the living word and active presence of Jesus Christ.

In the beginning.... God.

In the beginning was the Word.

In the beginning, God spoke.

In the beginning, God created.

In the beginning was a life and a light that the darkness could never overcome.

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The passage Nick just read also talks about time. It talks about "the fullness of time."

When the fullness of time had come...

Not the beginning of the story and not the end, but somewhere in the middle...

At a point in the story where there had already been a lot of twists and turns and ups and downs and surprises and heartaches.

At a point in the story where people were hungry for grace and truth (even if they didn't always realize it).

At a point in the story when hope was perhaps growing dim, when the darkness seemed dangerously close to overcoming...

When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son.

Born of a woman (to identify his identification with all humanity), born under the law (to emphasize his connection to the specifically Jewish story and hope), in order to redeem those under the law and so that we might receive adoption as children.

When the the fullness of time had come... Christmas happened. A baby boy born in strange circumstances to a teenage mother and an adoptive father.

The fulfillment of a promise made long ago.

When the fullness of time had come, joy interrupted despair and boredom and impatience and groaning and watching and waiting...

*Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of **great joy** for all the people (Luke 2:10).*

When the fullness of time had come... Divine Joy wrote an adoption story. As John 1 says,

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— **children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God** (John 1:12-13).

The fullness of time is the time when God speaks and tells his children—you and me—that no matter what our background might be, no matter how scandalous or unsavoury, no matter how unimpressive or full of conflict, no matter how *anything*, that we are loved, that we are welcomed, and that we are forgiven and redeemed, not because of anything that we did, not because of any “pure lineage,” but because of what God did.

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Christmas is indeed a time for joy because time has been filled up with joy.

Time has been completed, fulfilled, redeemed, transformed, and gathered into the story of God.

Your time, my time, COVID-time, Christmas time, good time, bad time, hard time, hopeful time, healing time, wasting time, time on our hands... All time.

And this is what gives us joy, even at the end of hard years like 2020.

In the beginning God. In the beginning light and life and grace and truth that darkness cannot overcome.

In the fullness of time. God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The interruption of Divine Joy. The creation of a new family.

And in the end, God.

Some of the young adults are going to sing “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” which contains some of my very favourite passages in any Christmas carol (and as you know, I have many!).

The song is based on a poem written on Christmas Day 1863 by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in the middle of the American Civil War.

Two years prior, Longfellow had lost his wife of eighteen years to whom he was incredibly devoted. One year before his eldest son had marched off to war against his father’s wishes where he would be severely wounded.

Christmas Day 1863 was not a good time for Longfellow. And that’s when he wrote these words:

*And in despair I bowed my head  
There is no peace on earth, I said;  
For hate is strong and mocks the song  
Of peace on earth goodwill to men.*

*Then rang the bells more loud and deep;  
God is not dead, nor does he sleep.  
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail  
With peace on earth, good will to men.*

All time is God’s time. Beginning, middle, end. Christ has filled all time with the promise of hope.

May this good news be our joy and our strength this Christmas season and into the year ahead, whatever it holds.

Amen.

