

48-04-01-The Fullness of Christmastime  
 Christmas, prophecy, culture, Incarnation  
 Gal 4:4-5

The Christ of Christmas fulfills the universal longings of humanity.

**INTRODUCTION:** (Mat 1:18-25 for the Scripture Reading)

–[“*It’s the Most Wonderful Time of the Year*” became a hit song in 1963. It’s still enjoyed today, because many still think *this is a wonderful time of the year.*]

–Christmastime *is wonderful*, although some may think “*Xmas means Xasperations, Xhaustion, Xchanges, Xtravangant Xhibitions, Xcessive Xcitement. and Xtemporaneous Xcuses...*” Even as Christians, we can get caught up in a whirlwind of Christmas stress, neglecting to prepare our hearts to quietly contemplate the wonder of Christ’s birth.

–Christmastime isn’t just for wrapping presents. This present year is being wrapped up. The newborn of last New Year’s Day is a senior now, full of days and ready to pass his torch to a new infant. There’s a fullness or ripeness to Christmastime. Each year it stirs up our inner longing for the true fullness only Christ can bring. Only **HOM.idea**.

–The 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas brought that fullness– Gal 4:4-5 (ESV), 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. What made the time ripe? This “fullness of time” came during...

**I. The Spread of Hellenistic Culture** (a delight in *Greek* ideals)

A. The Greeks emphasized a search for wisdom (in their *philosophy*):

1. [3 quotes by Socrates: “*The unexamined life is not worth living.*” / “*There is only one good, knowledge, and one evil, ignorance.*” / “*I know nothing except the fact of my ignorance.*”] Taken together these ideas say one thing: “*We haven’t arrived yet! We’re still in the learning process!*”
2. Greece brought a fullness of what human philosophy could offer, but it came up short: its fullness needed fulfillment.

B. The Greeks emphasized the human struggle (esp. in their *drama*):

1. [A famous professor, Elizabeth Vandiver, said the Greek Tragedy was a lasting contribution to the artistic exploration of the human condition.] That exploration continues today, whenever the film industry makes a good drama that probes into the struggle between good and evil.
2. [3 quotes by Greek playwright Euripides: “*Short is the joy that guilty pleasure brings.*” / “*I know indeed what evil I intend to do, but stronger than all my afterthoughts is my fury, fury that brings upon mortals the greatest*

evils.” / “I have found power in the mysteries of thought, exaltation in the changing of the Muses; I have been versed in the reasonings of men; but Fate is stronger than anything I have known.”] The human condition shouts a question: “What is humanity’s final fate?” They had no answer back then, because **God hadn’t yet sent the Answer**.

C. The Greeks emphasized the goodness of the body (in art & sports):

1. History professor Kenneth Clark said that the Greeks saw the human body as something to be proud of, so they displayed it nude not only in their statues and pottery, but in exercising naked in gymnasiums and competing naked in their annual Olympics games. He wrote, “*Greek confidence in the body can be understood only in relation to their philosophy...of human wholeness. Nothing that related to the whole man could be isolated or evaded.*”]
2. Nor did Christ evade it— Phil 2:6-7 (ESV), who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. (In this “*fullness of time*,” God took on *our human flesh*.)
3. Our text says, “*God sent forth His Son, born of a woman...*” This Greek acceptance of the human body reminds us of *Christ’s acceptance of humanity*, for which we praise Him in the *Te Deum*: “*When You became man to set us free, You did not disdain the Virgin’s womb.*”

**TRANS:** *Hellenistic ideals* survive today! It’s still “*the fullness of time*.” Look at our emphasis on education, on drama, our focus on the body. Each emphasis represents a longing: a *wish to know truth*, a *desire for human tragedy to end*, a *hope for mortal bodies to put on immortality*. **Only in the Christ of Christmas are these universal longings of humanity fulfilled....** This “fullness of time” was also in...

**II. The Spread of Roman Culture** (the benefits of the *Pax Romana*)

- A. Rome spread a common language over the whole Mediterranean (not Latin, but the *lingua franca*, Koiné Greek) – Communication is BIG in the mind of God, making this a *ripe time* for spreading the Gospel. Even the NT was *written in Koiné Greek*.
- B. Rome not only built a road system to bring the Empire together, but policed land and sea for pirates and bandits, making travel faster and safer. (This, too, helped the Gospel spread rapidly).
- C. Roman law was one of the greatest benefits of the *Pax Romana*:
  1. It brought peace, freeing Mediterranean countries from war.
  2. It brought civilization a new concept of justice and equity (but

only through *external force*, **not by changing people’s hearts....**)

**TRANS:** Rome gave people a chance to stop and take a breath of fresh air, but God let that breath become the wind of His Holy Spirit. *Peace in the Empire made the time ripe for the Prince of Peace to come*. His *conquest* would be one of individual hearts. He would conquer people *by His wonderful love....* **Finally, this “fullness of time” was in...**

**III. The Spread of Jewish Culture** (Synagogues were *everywhere!*)

- A. The Pax Romana effected Palestine.... Jews started moving all over the Mediterranean, taking their Jewish faith with them.
- B. This exodus from Palestine effectively spread an OT knowledge of God throughout the Empire. Many Gentile converts to Judaism—in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost—got to hear God’s Word spoken in their own language, when the Holy Spirit came.
- C. The time was *ripe!* The Gentiles knew their gods didn’t fulfill the longings of the human soul. *Jews spoke about a morally holy God Jehovah who cared for people and planned to send a Messiah*. The Gentile world was ready for a God like that, and for His Messiah!

**CONCLUSION:**

–When these 3 great cultures were intermingled, “*the fullness of time had come*.” To the Jewish people, born under the Law, “*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.*” Synagogues are still everywhere, but far outnumbered by the churches of Him who said, “I will build my church.” –Back then, it was “the fullness of time,” and it still is. Human hearts have not changed. Even if blind to the heart’s real desires, people still long for the happiness and joys of human wholeness that God intended. They long for “the peace that passes understanding.” What they really need to find is a living relationship with the kind of loving God who wants to be *our Father*. These longings—universally felt by humanity down through the ages—are **only brought to fulfillment by receiving the Christ of Christmas**.