

**GAL 4.4, 5: GOD'S TIMING – OR GOD WELL AND TRULY SURPASSED DELIA!** (Central Baptist Church, Chelmsford: Christmas Day 2013)

**WHEN THE RIGHT TIME CAME.....**

How long does it take to boil an egg?

According to one woman, it takes all the time you need to sing the three verses of Onward Christian Soldiers.

Delia Smith, however, prefers to be more precise. “*Carefully lower the eggs into gentle simmering water. Simmer exactly 1 minute, then remove the saucepan from the heat, put a lid on and leave the eggs for a further 5 minutes for size 4, or six minutes for size 2*”.

If you want a hard-boiled egg, then “*place the eggs in a saucepan of cold water, bring them up to a gentle simmer, and simmer exactly 7 minutes for size 4 eggs or 9 minutes for size 2 eggs*”.

Yes, for cooking timing is all important.

And what is true of cooking was also true of God's sending of Jesus into our world.

According to the Apostle Paul timing was of the essence.

**“When the right time came, God sent his own Son”**

When preparing this sermon, I ‘Googled’ the phrase ‘*right timing*’, and discovered a host of sites relating to the right best time for a woman to get pregnant.

On reflection, this is quite apposite for my text today. Or is it?

The timing of God sending his Son into the world had nothing to do with Mary's fertility, rather other factors were at play.

**1. *The Roman empire had reached its peak***

Rome had conquered and subdued the known, inhabited world.

And in conquering and subduing this world, Rome had built its roads.

Like Hitler's autobahns, these roads were built for the easy movement of troops.

But in God's good providence they facilitated the travel of the first Christian preachers.

Jesus may have been born in a Roman backwater – but, thanks to the Roman communications system, this babe of Bethlehem, this Jesus of Nazareth, became a household word within a century or two.

**2. *Greek had become the common language of the Empire.***

The Roman Empire was composed of many nations and many tongues.

There was no common mother-tongue.

For instance, in Rome people spoke Latin, but in Palestine people spoke Aramaic.

But thanks to the exploits of Alexander the Great, there was a common trade language, and that was Greek. Everybody knew a bit of Greek – even fishermen like Peter and Andrew.

It's a bit like English today.

Wherever you are, people know English.

True, they may speak English with a funny accent – just think of the Australians, let alone the Americans!

When Jesus came into the world, Greek was the common language.  
It was this common language which helped Christian preachers to tell the good news of Jesus to others.

It was this common language, which enabled the Christian Gospel to break out from the narrow confines of Judaism and become the faith for everyone.

### **3. *There was a wide-spread hunger for God.***

The old gods of Greece & Rome had lost their hold on the common people.

Nobody really believed in the gods who frolicked on Mount Olympus.

People were looking for a religion that was real and satisfying.

This was the time of the growth of the ‘mystery’ religions, which talked of personal salvation. But even these popular mystery religions failed to satisfy: for they too were mythological – the gods they worshipped died and rose each year.

This was also the time when many non-Jews were attracted to the lofty ideals of Judaism.

The Ethiopian official whom Philip met on the desert road was typical of many non-Jews who went to Jerusalem in search of God.

People all over the world were hungering after God – and at the right time God sent his Son

### **4. *The Jewish Law had done its work***

We Christians must never forget that Jesus cannot be understood apart from the Old Testament. He is the Messiah, the one whom the Jews had long awaited.

But by the time Jesus came the Jewish religion had reached its sell-by date.

It had become a negative rather than a positive force.

It had become burdensome rather than life-enhancing.

The Jewish law had done its work in preparing for the coming of Jesus.

It was very much “**the right time**” when God sent his Son

## **..... GOD SENT HIS SON**

### **1. *A one-off event***

I began by talking about boiling an egg – but boiling an egg is an everyday experience.

Well, perhaps you don’t boil an egg every day – but there is nothing special about boiling an egg. It is a standard kitchen procedure.

Whereas God’s sending his Son into the world was a one-off event.

At a particular time in human history God chose to send his Son.

Alas, the way we sometimes talk of Christmas can be misleading

We look forward to the coming of the Christ-child – whereas in fact the Christ-child has come!

We sing, “Yes Lord, we greet you, born this happy morning” as if he was a new-born.

No, God sent his Son over 2000 years ago.

His birth was a one-off

## 2. *An amazing event*

Indeed, it was an amazing one-off event. Without exaggeration, the birth of Jesus is the most stupendous event that has ever happened in human history.

The circumstances surrounding his birth may have been very ordinary, but not his actual coming. God, the creator and sustainer of this universe in all its vastness, sent his Son into our world.

The more we know about the universe, the more amazing it becomes – for our world is but a speck in the cosmic galaxy.

And yet God sent his Son into our world to become one with us.

In the words of Paul, “**he came as the son of a human mother**”

Jesus, the Son of God, who had from all eternity been sharing in the life of God became a man of flesh and blood, a man like us.

In the words of one commentator: “*He was vulnerable to all the conditions of human life which constantly threaten and unsettle – fear, loneliness, suffering, temptation, doubt and ultimately godforsakenness*” (Cousair). This is truly amazing.

## 3. *A sombre event*

Almost without exception a birth is an occasion for joy and celebration

But when God sent his Son into the world, he sent his Son to die

**He came to redeem us.**

Here the Cross is in view.

For when Jesus came, he came to rescue us from the grip of sin and death.

The other day I came across a wonderful acronym for sin: THPTMTU

‘The Human Propensity To Mess Things Up’

It’s not just bankers who mess things up, it’s not just politicians who mess things up, it’s people like you and me. We have messed up our lives and the lives of others – big-time.

Jesus came to free us from the mess.

## 4. *A life-changing event*

Or put more positively, Jesus came “**so that we might become God’s sons and daughters**”.

Yes, Christmas is all about the family – about God’s family

He sent his Son so that we might become brothers & sisters to one another – that in itself can be a life-changing event, to be surrounded by people who love us and care for us

But even more amazingly, we find ourselves able to call God ‘Abba, Father’.

The God of all the universe is a God who loves us, a God who cares for us – here is not just truth to know – but truth to experience. What a difference the sending of Jesus has made to our world. It is truly a life-changing event