



Christmas Eve - December 24, 2010
Rev. Dr. Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

It's About Time Luke 2:1-7

Welcome. Out of towners. Those who deferred to family. Not sure you believe this stuff. Sweet story...but not true, is it? God didn't really come to earth, did He? Well...you've come to a place where we actually believe it **is** true. That God-baby changed the world. Changed our lives. Who knows...He could change your life, too. Let's see what happens.

There are a lot of words in Luke's Christmas story that might be easy to skip over, they are so simple and straightforward. Like the ones in Luke 2:6: **"While they were there, the time came...."** What does Luke mean when he says, "...the time came?" Of course! It was baby time! Nine months had passed **both the baby and the mommy** were in agreement: he'd been inside long enough! Time to make his entrance into the world.

I wonder how many women here tonight are carrying a new life inside of them? I wonder how many husbands here tonight just received the shock of their life? Certainly the most memorable Christmas in the Toone family came 15 years ago tonight. Christmas Eve 1995. **"The time"** had not quite come, but **"the time"** was coming soon! Cyndi was very pregnant with Cooper ...and I had what passed for a cell phone (back in the Stone age of technology)—sitting on my pulpit during Christmas Eve services down in the gymnasium. The pastors knew that if the call came, someone better be ready to preach the rest of the services because I would be on my way to the hospital. **The time had come...**

"While they were [in Bethlehem] the time came..." Pull out your pew Bibles. Turn to page _____. When we think about the Christmas story, we assume that it starts right here...right at the beginning of the New Testament. The Virgin Mary gets pregnant miraculously, nine months pass, and out comes the Savior of the world. "The time came." Simple as that, right???

Well, not really! God's decision to send his son to earth didn't happen here. God didn't cast about for a new idea because nothing else had worked so far and he was getting desperate. The story of Christmas begins back here...way back in the beginning of the Bible. In Genesis chapter 3, right at the start of creation...right in the Garden of Eden...we read the first prophesy concerning the coming of the Son of God. And for the rest of the Old Testament...history books and the Psalms and

prophets...that promise is repeated again and again and again. "The savior is coming. The savior is coming. The savior is coming."

But after centuries of waiting and nothing to show for it, God's people stopped believing in that promise. They gave up hope. **God wasn't sending any savior.** God had forgotten them. Or given up on them. Or was mad at them. Or maybe ...there wasn't a God at all. Maybe the whole thing was a myth.

Ahhh...that wasn't it. **The time just wasn't right.** God's time hadn't come. **Xmas presents.** Tonight? Tomorrow? For us...had to stay in bed until folks got up. So hard! Wanted to see what Santa had brought so bad...but had to stay in bed until parents got up. LISTENED for their door! And FINALLYYYYYY....when I heard my parents get up and walk down the hall, I would say, **"It's about time."** **(Everyone say that!)**

That's what people in the world were saying about God. **"It's about time... you kept your promise, God! It's about time you came and saved us. Helped us. Made us free."** But God wasn't ready. And if the Bible teaches us anything, it teaches us that God won't be rushed. God **took his time** preparing for that Bethlehem moment. He called **Abraham** to start a new nation of people to bless the world. He called **Moses** to lead those people to the Promised Land. He called prophets to tell them how to live ...and **to remind them that their savior was coming.**

Even during the silent time...the 400 years between the Old and New Testaments when the prophets weren't speaking...God didn't stop working. A warrior named Alexander... conquered most of the world. For the first time the entire world spoke the same language. Greek. **Then** came the Romans. They built great roads and provided centuries of peace.

And all this time, the world was growing tired of false religions with stone gods and magic spells. There was a longing in human hearts for truth and simplicity; a longing for religion that didn't **seem like a carnival sideshow.** To a man, the world seemed to be crying out, **"It's about time, God...about time you showed up!"**

And only then...when God had provided a world-wide language with which to tell the story, world-wide peace, world-wide super highways for the Apostle Paul to spread the news...only when the religion-weary world was desperate for truth...only then ...when God had every detail in place.... did He say, **"OK...here I come! It's time."** In his letter to the Galatians, the Apostle Paul writes, **"In the fullness of time, God sent his son..."** On that night in Bethlehem, **the time came.** Nine months. Right on time, yes. But more than that. Thousands of years of preparation; thousands of years of waiting. Finally **"the time came..."** And it **was about** time.

Back to 1995. Cooper started out life as a great preacher's kid. He gave his old man a break and waited until Christmas morning. Cyndi went into labor at 6:00 a.m. and Cooper made his appearance at 1:15 on Christmas day after about seven hours of labor. I realize how fortunate we were that Cyndi's labor was **only** 7 hours...but 7 hours was long enough. **I was exhausted!** And both of us were thinking, "**It's about time!**"

But that's nothing compared to the woman who was in labor for 52 hours. Or the woman who was six weeks overdue...10 ½ month pregnancy! Wowza! What do you think those women were saying when their babies finally came? "**It's about time!**"

And how about Mary? Even her fiancé doubted her incredible story about the angel! Mary had to leave her town to avoid the ridicule. She was **carrying** an unexpected baby. **Carrying** the burden of knowing that she would raise the Messiah. **Carrying** the weight of the world upon her young shoulders. **And to top it all off, how about a trip to Bethlehem! Whoo hoo!** A ninety mile donkey ride, nine months pregnant, hotels booked, no hospital in the area. The best they could do was a cave where they kept the animals. So when Joseph finally settled Mary down in some fresh straw and Mary finally delivered her child ...I wonder if she felt like crying out...to Joseph...to the inn keeper...to God and to anyone else who might hear..."**It's about time!**"

Any of you saying those words tonight? **It's about time! It's about time** I got a job; I've been unemployed for 18 months! **It's about time** my marriage got better; the joy went out of it years ago. **It's about time** my kids treated me decently. **It's about time** my health improved! **It's about time** my life had some purpose.

Last Monday I asked my daughter, Rachel, if she wanted to join me for a last minute shopping trip to the Kitsap Mall. I've only been there once but it seemed like a good idea. **It was a horrible idea.** The freeway was busy; the side streets were packed; we were waiting for the light to change 4 times to make it through an intersection. So, by the time we **got** to the mall, I was already frazzled.

We parked, we walked in, did our shopping and came out with two hours to spare before our party. We started walking to the car. Guess what? **No car.** Okay...no problem...just retrace our steps and look a little more carefully. We were probably distracted. So...we retraced our steps more carefully...guess what...**no car.** Hmmmm... So we started walking up and down the aisles of the parking lot from one end of the section to the other. **No car.** I started pressing on my alarm button. No alarm. No car. **Rachel and I split up.** She started at one end of the parking lot, I at the other, walking back and forth like we were mowing the lawn; we would meet in the middle. We met in the middle. **No car.**

How do you think I was feeling about now? Wet. Frustrated. **Humiliated.** I've heard about the guy who loses his car in the parking lot. My gracious, Christian

response has always been the same: **what an idiot!** Now **I** was the idiot. **I thought, "It's begun! I'm going senile."** My only consolation was that my very bright college daughter couldn't find the car, either. Then I thought, "Maybe someone stole it." I could call the police. Problem is, the state just made me change my license plates. I don't remember my license number. "I've got a gold 2003 Subaru." Hmmm, that narrows it down. I didn't think the police would find that very helpful.

All the while this stuff was going through my head, I am walking up and down the **same** aisles in the **same** parking lot pressing the **same** alarm button, getting wetter. And madder! By now, we had been looking for 15 minutes. That may not sound like very long but, I guarantee you...**it was a lifetime.**

Finally, Rachel says, "Daddy, I don't think we went into the mall through those doors. I think we are in a different parking lot." Of course, I **knew** I we were in the right parking lot but, just to humor my daughter...and to give me more time to figure out how I was going to explain to my wife that she needed to drive to Silverdale and pick us up...I said, "OK, let's walk over to the **next** parking lot. Same drill. You start at one end; I'll start at the other."

Guess what? Three minutes later, a phone call: "I found the car-har, I found the car-har." **We were looking in the wrong parking lot the whole time!** And all I could think-when I tumbled into that car, wet, frustrated, humiliated, late, **"It's about time!"**

If you showed up here this Christmas Eve and the truth is, you feel lost...you feel like you can't find your way...you feel like your life is so confused, so messed up...maybe **it's about time** you started looking **somewhere else!** You've tried all the things you are supposed to try...good education, good job, right clubs, right marriage, right schools and activities for your kids, nice house, nice stuff...**but you still find yourself walking up and down the aisle of your life, pressing the alarm button.** Or **maybe** everything you've worked so hard for...marriage, kids, house, job...is slipping through your fingers. You know you need help but you are too embarrassed to ask.

Isn't it about time you looked somewhere else for the answers? You tried something different? Maybe it's about time you swallowed your pride, **called a marriage counselor** and got some help. Or came to **Couples' Life Plus**...both of you...instead of letting your wife go by herself. Maybe it's about time you **learned how to talk to your husband in a different way;** in a way that doesn't make him feel put down every time you open your mouth. Maybe it's time you **tossed out half of your kids' sports activities** so that your family can actually **be** together. Maybe it's time you **stopped sleeping with your boyfriend** and started building a relationship on a foundation that will last. Maybe it's time you **cut up your credit cards** and started actually paying for the things you buy. Or maybe it's time you decided that you **want your children to grow up loving God**

and the best way to do that is to go to God's house with God's people...yes, on Christmas Eve and Easter...but on some of the Sundays in between, too.

Maybe it's time to admit that you are looking for life in all the wrong places. Maybe it's time you started searching for the God who came searching for you 2000 years ago. Well, if you are feeling any of those things...**you** parked in the **right** parking lot tonight. The story of Christmas is the story of a God who painstakingly prepared...who patiently put everything into place so that, when the time was right...the world would be ready to receive her king. That baby...God in human form... changed everything...and he can change your life, too.

Maybe everything you are going through...all of the dead ends and u-turns... are God's way of preparing you for this moment...this moment when God says, "Isn't it about time you let me love you?" And the answer is ...Yes. It's about time!