

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
December 24, 2011**

***Galatians 4:4-5***

***“Did It All Just Fall Into Place?”***

**Hymns: “O Little Town of Bethlehem” –  
“Silent Night”**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

For a group of friends, it was a hopeful leap of faith based on a spur of the moment plan, if you could call it a plan. After all, there were certainly no assurances that this would turn out well. There weren't even any assurances that it wouldn't be an epic disaster. Money? A reliable mode of transportation? Place to stay? Weather? Tickets? Failure in any single one of those categories would ruin the plan and every single one of those things was a gigantic question mark. But, on they went, without a real plan, without much of an idea of what they were getting into. Now, fast forward three days, and we can find those friends shoulder to shoulder in the stands, snapping pictures and slapping high fives as kickoff of the Super Bowl is set to take place right there in front of them. As they look all around them, and think about the whimsical plan that had been hatched just three days earlier, there is one single thought going through each of their minds, "I can't believe this all fell into place!" A Super Bowl plan turned into a Super Bowl success, and it all seemed to work perfectly. Perhaps you know that feeling. Maybe you have an epic tale that you like to tell about a time when, against all odds, everything just fell into place.

If you had asked those who knew Mary and Joseph about the birth of their first child, they probably would've started the story by saying that absolutely nothing had fallen into place for that young couple. It all started with an untimely birth announcement, an announcement that had soiled the reputations of a happily engaged, young couple.

Yes, Mary and Joseph had told family and friends about the miraculous circumstances of this baby and the messages from the angels, but not everyone was a believer. As Mary's belly grew bigger, it was not hard for people to do the math backwards and figure out that something scandalous was going on. It was even easier to whisper and point. If this miraculous conception by the Holy Spirit had just come a few months later, Mary and Joseph would've already been married and nobody would have said, "Peep."

Another challenge occurred late in the pregnancy. With the birthdate imminent, the Roman government decided that it was "absolutely necessary" that they get a count of all the people within their empire, calling every person to report to their hometown. Unfortunately, that meant Joseph, with a pregnant Mary, had to return to a little town called Bethlehem. The family was worried about the arduous 80 mile journey through the hill country of Israel. But if they could make it through to Bethlehem, they could find a nice inn to stay at; the baby would be born; Joseph would register according to the census; and everything would be fine. Of course, nothing seemed to fall into place. When they arrived in Bethlehem, there was absolutely no place to stay, no inn to find, no room to rent. And so, the first-time parents found a little shelter in a barn and it was in that crude setting that Mary delivered her firstborn. They had some unlikely visitors, some happy shepherds and gift-bearing wise men from the east, but once again, things would not go smoothly. Because of a wicked and jealous king, Mary and Joseph were forced to flee from Bethlehem, travelling the desert trade roads with their young son, seeking safety in the land of Egypt.

"Nothing happened like they hoped," that friend the couple might say. "Poor Mary and Joseph, nothing fell into place for them." And you might tend to agree, especially you mothers who right now are thinking what you would've done to your husbands if they had dragged you through an experience like this. "Nothing fell into place." Contrasted to everything falling into place, perhaps this is a feeling you know a little better. Things happen in life which throw things off track and cause problems. And they continue to happen. Life often follows a less than ideal path, in our eyes. And when that happens, that hopeless feeling can come, "It seems as if nothing will just fall into place. Nothing will go like it should."

Except, of course, that everything happens like it should; everything happens according to plan, God's plan. That is the truth in your life and it was the truth on that first Christmas long ago. The

circumstances of Jesus' birth, all the twists and troubles that came upon Mary and Joseph, they all came about as they were supposed to. It was God's desire, it was God's will. That is what the Apostle Paul tells us as he says in Galatians 4:4-5, ***"When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons."***

Occasionally, you will hear a news story about a baby being born in unlikely circumstances; delivered by dad on the side of the road because the car broke down or delivered by a stranger in a jammed elevator. Those are amazing stories. These words from Paul tell us that the story of this Christmas birth is much more than just an incredible tale about a baby being born in crazy circumstances. This baby born in those unique circumstances is the fulfillment of a plan, carried out in amazing ways, not falling into place by luck or chance, but being guided by the God of all according to his timeline.

The reason that Mary and Joseph went on that roller coaster journey was so that we would know who this baby was. Each of those circumstances that we might look at as bumps in the road was foretold 400-700 years earlier through God's Old Testament prophets. They were the signs that would tell us that this was the Anointed Christ sent by God. Though it brought shame into Mary and Joseph's life, the fact that Mary was pregnant before marriage brought fulfillment to the prophet's words in Isaiah 7:14 about the Savior's mother, ***"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call him, 'Immanuel.'"*** Though the long trip to Bethlehem may have seemed like a huge inconvenience, it brought fulfillment to the prophet's words in Micah 5:2 about the Savior's birthplace, ***"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, who origins are from of old, from ancient times."*** Even that refugee trip to Egypt had purpose, fulfilling the prophet's words in Hosea 11:1 when God said, ***"Out of Egypt, I called my son."*** All those prophecies fulfilled, all those promises kept, they all showed that this happened just how God wanted it to occur. This boy Jesus was born when the time was right, according to plan. It didn't just happen this way by chance. It was his plan.

And it is a plan with great purpose. ***"He came to redeem those under the law."*** You see, God did not just make promises about this baby's birth, he made promises about his life. When sin entered the world through Adam and Eve in the Garden of

Eden, it put every person who comes into this world under a curse, the curse of the law. And that law says that the wages of sin for every single person is death, physical death, and worse, eternal death in hell. However, when sin entered the world, God's promise of deliverance also came. He said that he would solve the problem of sin. He wouldn't just sweep our sins under the rug; he couldn't just turn a blind eye. But he would send someone who could bear the brunt of the punishment of our sin. This Savior would need to live under the same burden of the law that we do. He would need to die because that is the punishment that sin called for. So this Savior needed to be human. He needed to be born of a woman. He needed to be born under the law. But he also needed to be able to accomplish something with his death. He needed to be perfect so that his death would serve as a valuable ransom for all people. For that reason, this Savior needed to be God. And that is why we see such an elaborate plan come to life on this Christmas Eve. It was so that God's own Son could come to this world in human form, true man and true God, Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world. It all happened on that first Christmas morn, not simply falling into place, but according to the purpose of God's love.

And God's plans and purposes continue to be carried out on this Christmas Eve more than 2000 years later and we can see the many ways in which God works in each of the many people who gather here tonight. What brought you here this evening? The paths and the motivations are probably very different. To be reminded of something you have known since you were a child? To make your parents or family members happy? To see what a Christmas invitation was all about? Whatever brought you here, the desire is the same. It comes from God. This is part of his plan. He wants you to be his child. He wants you to receive the great prize that he sent his only Son into this world to win. You are part of a plan that began thousands of years ago in a garden. You are part of a plan that carried Mary and Joseph through unbelievable circumstances. You are part of a plan that didn't just fall into place. You are part of a plan that happens just as it should and there is great comfort in that. ***"When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that they might receive the full rights of sons."*** (Galatians 4:4-5) What an incredible blessing that God brought into the world for everyone one of us that first Christmas.