

The Season of Life

Luke 1:26 –38

The seasons of life

Musicians, artists and poets. In 1725, Vivaldi composed his most famous work, *The Four Seasons*, the texture of each concerto resembling its respective season. What you just heard was an excerpt from the season of “Spring”.

Poets and artists have always been interested in depicting the seasons of the year. There’s a beauty known only to each season which engages and sparks the imagination (slide). Photographers love the seasons—their savage beauty and eloquent splendour. Poets love to paint pictures in the mind.

In my circle of friends, winter was always footy and netball, summer was cricket and the beach. The in-between seasons are like a waiting room for the main game. But there are not only seasons for sport, we can speak about the seasons of life. Just as each year has its seasons, so we each experience these seasons throughout our lives.

The Teacher and the seasons. There’s a book in the Bible that speaks about the seasons of life. And I’d like to start with this book—the Book Ecclesiastes. A few thousand years ago, the Teacher said this—and you’ll find it in Ecc 3:1–2 (slide), “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot that which is planted”.

The observation is as true now as it was then. To everything there is a season. The seasons of our lives. There is “a time to be born”. This marks the beginning of Spring. In the Spring of our lives we grow in anticipation of adulthood. At about 18 years of age this season comes to an end.

Then there is “a time to plant”—this is the Summer of our lives when we get about using what we have learnt in Spring. In the summer of life, we settle down and enjoy the best that life has to offer us. We try and get the best job. Often we marry and raise a family. The summer is usually the best time of our lives. If there is a wave to ride, we look for the crest every time.

Then, in the cycle of life comes “a time to uproot that which is planted”.

Uprooting comes in the Autumn of life. This season often starts when we are 55 years old. We draw upon the resources we have planted earlier in life. It's like we are harvesting the vegetables from our garden which were planted for another day. In this season we will begin to draw from our superannuation. Consolidate our finances and shed ourselves of unwanted possessions. In the autumn of life we transition from middle age to old age. We realise that things cannot stay the same.

We remember when we watched our parents pass through this season as they moved into their older years.

Lastly, the Teacher says, there is "a time to die". The Winter of life is old age. The heart specialist becomes our best friend. There are frequent trips to the chemist. We might sell the family home and move into a retirement village. To each of us there comes a time when material things no longer seem so important. My mum was in a nursing home. There came a time when everything she owned fitted into one room. It wasn't always that way.

These are the seasons of life—Spring, Summer, Winter and Autumn. Over in Uganda where I have been on three occasions, they have two seasons—the wet season and the dry season. Ugandans think it odd that we have four seasons. Two seasons makes much more sense to them. Perhaps, then, we can reduce our lives to two seasons—the season of life and the season of death.

Jesus and the seasons. God the Son for all eternity lived outside the seasons of this world. The news of Christmas is that he left his eternal, perfect home in order to become flesh and dwell amongst us. And when he did so he took upon himself the seasons of this world.

Jesus knew our seasons. He lived through our seasons. He knew what it was like to be human because he was human. Jesus lived through the season of life and the season of death. At Christmas we remember the beginning of his first season. At Easter we remember the season of his death which was cut short in the summer time of his life.

Jesus died to redeem us from sin and death. His resurrection gives us life. And these things were promised before his birth. The promises and the names.

The cry that help is coming

The promises and names. Almost the entire Bible is about Jesus. We cannot understand the Bible apart from Jesus. He told the men on the road to Emmaus that he fulfils the Law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms (Luke 24.44) which were speaking about him.

Indeed, the OT is a cry that help is coming. The OT identifies our problem and makes it clear that help is on its way. The birth of Jesus was never a surprise. There is promise after promise, prophecy after prophecy about the coming King who will deliver his people from sin and death and then he will rise to be their eternal ruler.

I think there was only one promise before my birth, “if he mucks up he’ll get a good flogging”. There are over 300 predictions from hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, predictions acknowledged by the rabbis, predictions which refer to a coming deliverer they call “Messiah”.

It was foreseen that Jesus would be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7.14).

The promises of a future King (Isaiah 9.6–7).

The prophecy concerning his birthplace (Micah 5.2).

The prediction of his miracles (Isaiah 35:5 –6), that he would enter Jerusalem on a donkey (Zech 9:9), and that he would die as a substitute for his people’s sins (Isa 53.1–12).

The great Bible themes of prophet, priest and king find their satisfaction in Jesus.

Christianity is not a self-help course. It’s not a philosophy for the weak minded. It’s not a walking frame for those who need an artificial prop in life. It’s not a way of creating hope when there is no hope. If it is any of these things then go away and be an atheist, be a Buddhist, be anything you want to be! Believe anything you want to believe as long as it doesn’t hurt others.

The OT cries out for a servant-king who will solve humanity’s greatest problem which is alienation from God. And the Gospels announce that this cry has been heard. Writers such as Luke not only tell us about his birth, but explain the significance of his birth. Luke is clearly an historian who is interested in people, dates and places. The historical reliability of the Christmas story means admitting that God exists. It means admitting that God has thrust

himself into human history. It means coming to terms with the implications. For clearly if we understand the Christ who was born then we have no right to ignore his rightful rule over us.

In the OT God announces that help is on its way. The OT announces that God so loves the world that he was never going to stand idly by. So the Lord Jesus entered the seasons of our lives.

The season of his birth

Human confusion and divine faithfulness. Come with me to the beginning of Luke's gospel. Luke begins his gospel by breathing OT air. He announces that the season for God's arrival has come. It's a surprising opening to a highly anticipated story.

Elizabeth is unable to conceive and Mary is not married and therefore a virgin. Two women unable to bear a child so it looks like the Christmas story is for another day.

Then an angel appears to Zechariah in Luke 1.13 and tells him that his wife Elizabeth will have a son. He is so gripped with fear that he fails to believe the angel and so the angel renders him speechless.

Then in verse 31 the angel of family planning appears to Mary and says, "You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end".

The promises of God overwhelm Elizabeth and Mary. Matthew says that the name "Jesus" means "he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21) and "Immanuel" means "God with us" (Matt 1:23).

God with us in order to save us and usher in an eternal kingdom. This baby born will be the greatest ruler—the greatest King—that not only Israel (Luke 1:32b–33a), but the world (Luke 1:33b) has ever seen. In her song, a few verses later, Mary describes the child as "my Saviour"; indeed, he will be the greatest Saviour the world has ever seen for he will rescue his people from sin and death. He will undo the curses of Genesis 3 common to all mankind.

Mary says in Luke 1.51.

He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent away empty (1:51–53).

Around the time of Elizabeth and Mary, God is organising events in the Roman world. Caesar Augustus, the Roman ruler, declares that a census should be taken so Joseph and Mary must travel to Bethlehem.

Where is Bethlehem? It's no-where, really.

Who is Joseph? He's no-one really.

Who is Mary? She's no-one really. She's like mild and meek Hannah who we met in 1 Samuel. Israel was in trouble in the time of Judges and God responded with Hannah. And again Israel is in big trouble and God responds with Mary.

In a quiet corner of Israel, after 400 years of prophetic silence, the Lord announces to humble Israelites that the Saviour will soon be born. In the confusion of humanity, Mary believes the promises of God and so she represents faithful Israel.

In the season of spring in the 1st century Roman world, the Creator of the universe entered the seasons of our lives.

Now is the season of salvation. Jesus the Saviour—Jesus the King. Christmas is a reminder that Jesus should be your King in every season of life. Jesus is royalty—he was born a king, he proclaims his kingdom, he was born to save his people from the clutches of sin and death.

God became man to lift us out of the tragic seasons of life and set us free to live with him forever.

Responding to God's faithfulness. Are you ever board with Christmas? I can understand that might be the case. The Christmas holiday season can be rather chaotic and stressful. And expensive.

First. Avoid the predictable reaction to Jesus.

I was down at Shopping World the other day. And as I walked past Santa Claus he noticed me and he waived at me. I've never been waived to by Santa Claus. It's hard not to get a nice, warm fuzzy feeling. A big, fat man in a big red suite on a 35 degree day with a big happy smile.

Our *post-Christian* world means we live in a *post-Christmas* world. When society abandoned the Christian worldview, it abandoned the biblical meaning of Christmas. Christmas isn't about our goodness, it's about God's goodness. Christmas isn't about warm, fuzzy feelings, it's about God saving sinful, lost people.

But in this post-Christmas world we celebrate the goodness of people and aim to provide a Santa-induced happiness. Ed Stetzer is a Christian commentator and he wrote this about the babe in the manger:

To trust in God's goodness, ultimately, isn't to live a life free of struggle or strife, and to never doubt in the midst of them ... Instead, to live a life in step with our good God is to recognize that the evils of this world have, ultimately, met their end in Christ; through his life and through his sacrifice, sin and death and suffering will one day be no more.

The lame shall walk, the blind shall see, and the dead shall be raised—these are the promises his coming ushered in for the people of God. The redemption we see now in part, we shall one day see more fully in his coming kingdom. So, doubts are not wrong, but they do give us a moment to choose faith—as Joseph and Mary did.

(slide)

Rather than living in a world of constant questions, allow this tiny babe in a manger to give us the answer: "God is not dead, nor doth he sleep". Jesus is here. God has come to us. And he is good—so much better than we ever imagined".

Avoid a post-Christmas, secular, worldly response to Jesus.

Two. Luke's account of the birth of Jesus reminds us that unless God takes action we remain dead in our sin. Who initiates the action? Who does the saving? Luke portrays the birth narrative as a movement of the Spirit of the Lord. The angel of the Lord promises women, who should not bear children, the gift of children. Later, Elizabeth filled with the Holy Spirit and she praises Mary. Then Mary herself glorifies God in song under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Zechariah is filled with the Spirit and he prophesies.

The Spirit at work at the birth of Jesus is the same Spirit that was given to us at Pentecost. The same Spirit who brought you salvation. We are not deserving to have "Emmanuel" with us but God freely gives and so we delight in saying that "God is with us".

If we were to sum up Christmas in four words, it must be "God is with us". Not with us in the first century and now gone, but with us right now. With you right now if you come to Christ humble and empty-handed then he fills you with his Spirit and lifts you up to be with him.

This week, enjoy the Christmas cake, rum balls, leg ham and pavlova. But these things come and go just like our gifts come and go. So many Christmas gifts are rebranded and sold on eBay after Christmas. But Jesus is here to stay. Praise God that he was born to be our Saviour and our King. So we join with Mary and say, "My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour" (Luke 1.46–47).