**Perfect Timing**

It was October 28, 1886, the eyes of America were on New York Harbor for the dedication of the Statue of Liberty. New York Senator William Evarts was scheduled to give a speech, at the conclusion of which a little boy would wave a flag signaling men high in the statue to let loose a giant French flag.

Unfortunately for Sen. Evarts, he paused too long early in his speech and before he was finished. The boy thinking he had finished waved his flag setting the rest of the events in motion. Everyone cheered. Sen. Evarts never did finish his speech. Timing is often crucial.

The spring of 1915 saw the greatest ever class of graduates at the United States Military Academy at West Point. That one class graduated 59 generals:

         Two Generals of the Army (5 stars) Eisenhower and Bradley

         Two Generals (4 stars)

         Three Lieutenant Generals (3 stars)

         24 Major Generals (2 stars)

         24 Brigadier Generals (1 star)

The timing was such that these men came of age in WW2 leading America to victory over Germany and Japan.

The timing was perfect for the 1949 graduating class of Harvard University to account for the most successful class of business geniuses in history. It was the longest, richest, and most widespread peace time boom in modern world history. 1 out of 5 of these graduates, called the 49’ers, became millionaires.

         James E. Burke of Johnson & Johnson

         C. Peter McCollough of Xerox

         Thomas S. Murphy of Capital Cities/ABC

         William J. Ruane of the Sequoia Fund

         John Shad of Wall Street and Chairman of the SEC

         Marvin S. Traub of Bloomingdale’s

         Lester Crown of General Dynamics (family has owned Maytag, Hilton Hotels, Rockefeller Center and the Chicago Bulls.)

Here’s a fun story. A minister’s wife was on the game show “The $128,000 Question” in Canada. She and her husband prayed for guidance because they were desperately poor. She got to the $16,000 level but she and her husband felt they needed more than that to get by, so she agreed to try again the next day. If she missed this question she would lose the 16K.

To relax that next morning she wandered around a shopping mall in Toronto. She happened to pick up and leafed through a book that mentioned the titles and opening dates of Agatha Christie’s plays. It turned out, that her 32K question was exactly that.

Was it perfect timing that she picked up that book that day? Was it a miracle orchestrated by God to bless that couple?

We often say, *Timing is everything*. Well it may not be everything but it sure can make a difference in the outcome of an event.

The Apostle Paul wrote, *When the time had fully come, God sent His Son...*Galatians 4:4f The timing of the first Christmas wasn’t an accident. It happened according to God’s perfect timing. *When the time had fully come*, or as your translation may say, *in the fullness of time*?

The historical events of the birth of Christ came about just as God planned for them. The hand of providence controlled everything according to His design. With foreknowledge God brought about the miracle of the incarnation with perfect timing.

Caesar gave the order for a census to be taken at just the right time so that Mary and Joseph would be in Bethlehem for the birth which would be consistent with the prophecy in Micah 5:2, that He would be born in Bethlehem.

Had Caesar not made his decree about taxes when he did, Mary and Joseph would not have been in Bethlehem when Christ was born. We can see the hand of God even in secular history often, and that plays an important role in the Christmas story.

It was the right time in history for the Messiah to come. Alexander the Great had conquered the known world spreading the Greek language so that the message could be carried to the world in a common language.

I was reading a piece by someone describing parallels between Caesar Augustus and Jesus.

         Augustus was born early in the morning, Sept. 23, 63 B.C. His birthday became a popular holiday because he was a popular Emperor.

         His father died when he was young, as it is believed Joseph did.

         At 12 YOA he was mature enough to deliver a eulogy for his grandmother Julia, the sister of Julius Caesar. At 12 Jesus was found in the Temple in deep discussion with the most learned men of Jerusalem.

         Both men had genealogy that went back to nobility.

         Each built a world-wide empire.

         Both had compassion for the poor. Augustus needed taxes to satisfy a massive feeding program.

         Both had compassion for the sick. Augustus provided for the needs, including education, of the children of mentally ill patients.

         Augustus pardoned many people who had sinned against him and allowed his political opponents to hold high office.

         He urged decency in the theater.

         He was loved by the masses.

         His birthday was celebrated with festivals and gifts.

         He died (incidentally when Jesus was about 10 YOA) at about 3pm.

This is not to say that the parallels mean anything other than to suggest that the time was right for someone like Jesus. The Christmas event brings together the secular and sacred.

Mary’s conception had to happen at the right time so that she would come due while they were in Bethlehem. It was the right time in the lambing season for the first evangelists, the shepherds to be in the fields.

I can’t say exactly why God decided this time was the “*fullness of time*” but He did and He brought everything together, both secular and sacred history, to introduce His Messiah. Centuries of history prepared the world for this event. Jesus came when God determined that the time was right.

Have you ever seen a picture of a Concentrated Solar power generating site?

There are several such facilities around the world where thousands of mirrors reflect solar heat to a central area which in turn drives a turbine to produce usable electricity.

You can picture all the prophets of the Old Testament focusing their prophecy on this one event. Everything they preached pointed to this. This was God’s plan from the beginning, He would send His Messiah to be the Savior of the world. And God waited until the time was right. God made sure the world was ready.

On September 6-8, 1886 Harvard University celebrated 250 years since their founding. As the students marched in parade the freshmen class carried a large banner that read, “*The University has been waiting 250 years for us*.” I don’t know that anyone was specifically waiting for that class, but the whole world was waiting for Jesus and for many more than 250 years.

*In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of all the Roman world, and everyone went to his home town to register*. Luke 2:1,3 The time was right for Christ to be born. God’s timing is always perfect.

Let’s go on a bit of rabbit trail. We celebrate December 25 as Jesus’ birthday. Some folks argue that this is a pagan holiday. December 25th was in fact a time of celebration long before Jesus’ birth. This was the Winter Solstice, the time of year when the days started to become longer in the northern hemisphere.

The darkness, which seemed to have been overpowering the light, now receded as the sun shone, pushing the darkness back.

The Persians and the Romans observed this and choose December 25th as a day to celebrate the victory of the sun. That was a cause for celebration. It always feels good when the days start to lengthen.

Because of this secular history of celebrating December 25th many Christians and non-Christians think we’re celebrating a pagan holiday. Let’s not forget, the victory of the sun was a holiday for Christians too.

Some early Christians, no one knows exactly when, saw in this an opportunity to exalt the Son of God, the one who created the sun.

They adopted this holiday to rejoice about the coming of Jesus into history to save the world.

Criticism of Christian for this would be true if Christians celebrated with drunkenness and debauchery as the pagans did, but instead we celebrate with love and sharing. Christians have changed the nature of this holiday.

If someone wants to ignore December 25th they’re not hurting anyone. It’s no big deal. Personally I like the idea of “*taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ*” (2 Corinthians 10:5). And I like Paul’s admonition to, *Be very careful how you live, not as unwise but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*(Ephesians 5:15f) Christians have chosen to redeem or buy back this celebration.

Besides, if using a pagan holiday for a Christian celebration is the wrong thing to do, you’d think we’d get worked up over the names of the days of the week, each named after a pagan idea.

         Sunday is “*Sun’s Day*”, or the Day of the sun.

         Monday is” *Moon’s Day*”.

         Tuesday is named after Twia, a god of war.

         Wednesday is “*Woden’s Day*”, Woden being the Norse equivalent of Mercury. (The name actually translates “violent insane headship”.

         Thursday is “*Thor’s Day*”.

         Friday is associated with Freya, the wife of Woden.

         Saturday is “*Saturn’s Day*”. Saturn is a Roman god of wealth.

None of the days are named after anything specifically Christians. It’s no big deal. I think we do well to capture the secular and use it to glorify Christ.

I think it’s clever of God that His people would use a secular holiday to promote the most important event in the history of the world, the Christ event. God’s timing is perfect, including the timing of this celebration.

God’s timing is perfect when He calls us. When He calls us to know Him. When He calls us to obey Him. When He calls us to serve Him.

I think one of the saddest stories in the Bible is in Acts 24 when the Apostle Paul was standing trial before the Governor of Caesarea, Felix. Felix listened to Paul’s preaching yet ordered him kept under guard but with freedom to have friends visit.

Days later Felix, with his wife Drusilla sent for Paul to tell them about Jesus. Felix got uncomfortable with the message and cut him off: *For now, go. Finding the time I will call for you*. Acts 24:25

I think the NIV captures the sentiment very well, *That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.*

Did anybody sent out Christmas cards with that?

*Merry Christmas!*

*When I find it convenient,*

*I’ll respond to the*

*reason for the season*.

It’s always the right time to respond to God. Now is the right time to know the Savior. Now is the right time to obey God. Now is the right time to serve Jesus.

God knows you and His timing is always perfect. He knows the circumstances of your life. He knows what is to come. He also knows that there is no wrong time to accept His gift, the Savior.