

The Nativity of Our Lord (Christmas Eve) • December 24, 2015

St. John's Lutheran Church, Alexandria, VA

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Isaiah 9:2-7

“The King is Born!” (*The King is Coming!*, pt. 5)

It is Christmas Eve. The King is born! So who cares?

When a baby is coming into the world, people close to that family tend to get somewhat excited. When was the last time that you had the chance to look forward to the arrival of a new child? If you're not expecting right now, you can probably still remember what it was like to hear about a pregnancy for the first time. You might have waited for the birth of a brother or sister, a nephew or niece, a grandchild or godchild. There's usually time to get ready, buying baby gifts or helping to make a room ready for the newest member of the family. Sometimes it seems like you have to wait forever for the baby to be born – I know some expectant mothers who have felt that way! So when you finally hear the birth announcement, that's something you get to celebrate. These days, it might come as a phone call or text, a tweet or Instagram post, or maybe even a card in the mail. It's special. So how do you announce the birth of a king?

This evening marks the close of the season of Advent, a time of preparation and expectation that leads up to Christmas. Here at St. John's, we've been hearing from prophets like Jeremiah, Malachi, Zephaniah, and Micah, each proclaiming the king who was coming into the world, the king that God was sending to be the ruler that His people needed. Because they needed someone better than what our world had to offer.

Kings can be great, beloved by their people. That holds true for other leaders, people in positions of power and authority; but it's not always the case, is it? Here in the United States, we live in a nation that was founded on the principle of government free from the control of a monarchy. In a real kingdom, the king is the actual head of the government: he holds the power and authority. It's not something that we see much of in the world today. Everything centers on the king, because what the king does will in some way or another have an effect on the lives of his subjects. If the king isn't concerned about his people, and authority revolves around him, life can get bad pretty fast. Even a great king, like other good leaders, is limited in what he can do and how he does it. Any earthly king will have imperfect ability and incomplete authority. He'll fall short.

God's word to us tonight through the prophet Isaiah announces the birth of a king, our king. Please don't misunderstand: this isn't about getting a king for the United States. Over the past many decades, Americans may have been tempted to think of themselves as God's chosen people, that “God is on our side” as a nation or as individuals. But truth be told, we have often chosen to turn from God's instruction, to walk in darkness as individuals and as a nation. We want “the zeal of the LORD of hosts” to be with us and do what we'd have Him do. But that's not who we are. That's not what we need. And that's not what we get.

It's Christmas Eve. The world around us still acknowledges, in part, that this is a holiday about the one who was born for us in that little town of Bethlehem. We are “Christ-mas” people. We are part of something different from what the world can offer us. We are a part of that kingdom that is in the world but not of the world. For the past four weeks, we've been hearing about the king who was promised. We've been waiting for the good news of his arrival, waiting to celebrate. Isaiah's royal birth announcement is for you and me as the people of God in Christ: the king is born!

Isaiah tells us that we can expect something more from the King who is born for us. As the promised Messiah, Jesus is different from all the kings who came before or after. While many babies in history have gone on to become king, Christ is the only King who became a baby. **God Himself** has come as our king, bringing His divine authority and reign into our broken world and broken lives in order to restore them! Unlike earthly kings, Jesus' kingdom and the peace that he brings will have no end. He establishes justice and righteousness, not just for us here and now, but for all nations. The greater king, the Son given to us, is perfect and unlimited, able to do what we need him to do.

Everything centers on the king. But here's the difference in the kingdom of God: the king has come to serve, not to be served. Here's the difference in the kingdom of God: the king has come, not for his sake, but for you. Here's the difference in the kingdom of God: the king has come because he cares for each and every man, woman, and child, both those in his kingdom and those who have yet to come into it. Here's the difference in the kingdom of God: the king has come to give his life as a ransom, to “buy you back” from the kingdoms and the powers that want to control you, whether they be your own internal temptations,

your personal sin, or simply that natural temptation to think the world—and my God—revolve around me, and my wants.

In fact, the king has come because of your needs: your need to be loved, your need to be saved; your need to be rescued, your need to be given a future and a hope and peace that will, like the kingdom, have no end.¹

This is the king who came to save his people, far better than any our world had to offer. Instead of a crown of gold, he took a crown of thorns. And I declare to you this day—this holiday that really is a holy day—that Christ has come for you. Christ has died for you. Christ is risen for you. Christ will come again, for you.

In the weeks around Christmas, a lot of greeting cards are going through the mail. Many of those cards now include photographs, a way of giving friends and family a chance to see the faces that they might not have glimpsed for a long time. Those cards might also serve as birth announcements, with babies making their official photo debut alongside their parents. Isaiah's birth announcement of the coming king doesn't include photos, yet still he paints a vivid picture of this special child with the royal titles, "throne names," that this one-of-a-kind king shall be called.

Each pair of titles has a name that would describe any good king: counselor (wise leader), mighty (powerful warrior), father (people look up to him), and prince (even at birth, the king is royal). But with each title, the prophet points to how we can expect more from this king than any other. This is a king who "does wonders" – beyond being wise and extraordinary, he delivers miracles. He is a champion who brings the might of God Himself to conquer all enemies, even the powers of spiritual darkness. He is a father who is ours forever. And he is a prince who brings peace: the everlasting peace that comes from knowing the king of the kingdom of God.

A king is born! He is not just a sweet baby in a manger; he is a king who will reign forever. He came humbly. He came holy. He came for you. He came as the counselor of wonders. He came as the mighty God. He came as the everlasting Father. He came as the prince of peace. He came for you. We pray, as he came and taught us, this day and day after day, "Thy Kingdom Come." The kingdom will come, whether we pray for it or not, but we do pray that it may come **among us**. Today, the king has come. His kingdom is among us. We are his forever.²

It is Christmas Eve. Christ, the Savior is born! Christ, the king, is born! And *he* cares, for you.

Amen.

¹ Quoted from Dr. Andrew Bartelt, "The King is Coming!", Concordia Seminary, St. Louis

² *Ibid.*