

December 24, 2015
Isaiah 9:2-7

Christmas Eve C
The King is Born

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our Newborn King. Amen.

We know the waiting and anticipation of a birth. Two years ago Emily and I were anticipating the birth of our second daughter and now this Christmas we wait and anticipate for the birth of our third child in the summer. He or she that is to be born won't be a king or queen. We also live in a society that doesn't have a king. We do know from our fellow human beings in England how they followed (and maybe you did, too!) the royal births of Prince George and Princess Charlotte. Remember the pomp and circumstance of the announcement of the birth of future King George!

And even that monarchy is not really a kingdom as in the ancient world of Israel, where the king and his dynasty were everything – and actually affected the lowly lives of those over whom he ruled. Again, thinking of England, we might better recall Henry VIII and his obsession with having a male heir. Not only was the king himself the sole (and predominantly selfish) center and essence of the kingdom, around which everything revolved, but he also had to secure the future of the dynasty with a son. (Perhaps fathers can be like this when they want their name to continue).

So any royal pregnancy was closely watched. And you can hear the well-known words of our text as a royal birth announcement for a people who were under siege by the nations around them, who wondered if their kingdom would remain, who pinned their hopes and their futures on the birth of a prince and the succession of the kingdom?

“For Unto us a child is born!” But is it a boy!?!
YES! “For Unto us a Son is given”

And the ruling power will continue—on his shoulder!
And yes, he will have throne names that proclaim his importance and power!

And the king will endure –
“Of the increase of his rule and of peace there will be no end—
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 To establish it and to uphold it,
 With justice and righteousness
From this time forth and forevermore!”

But then comes a striking reminder, less so for the folks back then, who should have known that their king and their kingdom was not like any other. Remember that this was not a kingdom like the nations; this was the kingdom of God. And so this announcement concludes: “The zeal of Yahweh (The Lord) of Hosts will do this!”

So what does this have to do with us, dear family and friends in Christ, this Christmas Eve evening, this year, in our world and our culture that was founded on the principle of removing the king and establishing a society “of the people, by the people, and for the people?” We know the dangers of a monarchy where everything revolves around the king. We know how easily the “government can lie solely on his shoulders,” with little concern for anybody else, for all the men and women and children who want to work and play and be free.

Sometimes we want to think that the “zeal of the Yahweh (The Lord) of Hosts” will do whatever we think is best for us, and even for our nation, because, well, aren’t we the people of God? In fact, that is less a temptation in recent years, as our nation and society drift further away from even some sense of civic righteousness, of living in the ways in God has established his created order. But there is always the temptation to think that “God is on our side” as a nation, or even individually, to provide for us the life that we want.

But the kingdom of God, as our king would put it, is “in the world, but not of the world.” Like ancient Israel, we remember that we are involved with something unique, grounded in our relationship with God. And on a holiday when much of the world around us at least recognizes something of who we are as “Christ-mas” people, that is “Christ-center people” or “People of God in Christ,” we celebrate today and tomorrow what it means for us, in the “kingdom of *God*,” to hear the news that a “king is born.”

We have been talking about this king for the last four Sundays, as Advent has prepared us for this day. We have waited with the hopes of a mother who is “expecting”—and with her the future of the kingdom. And today we hear the birth announcement: “A child—a son—is born!”

And this birth means for us what a royal birth means for a kingdom. First, that the kingdom is secured, at least for another generation. It may not look that way, as we wonder about all the forces around us that work against what we confess as Christians. But remember; this is not just another kingdom; this is the kingdom *of God*. The zeal of Yahweh (The Lord) of Hosts will do this, has done this. In fact, it is God himself who has come as king.”

That is why this kingdom, this increase of his rule, and of peace will have no end! That is why his justice and righteousness will be established from now and forevermore! That is why we celebrate this day something that is far greater than just another holiday, even a “national holiday,” for this kingdom is the kingdom of God, not just here, but everywhere, not like the nations, but for all nations!

Next, the king is, indeed, the true essence of the kingdom. Everything does revolve around him. But here’s the difference in the kingdom of God: this KING has come to serve, not to be served! Here’s the difference in the kingdom of God: this KING has come, not for HIS sake, but FOR YOU! Here’s the difference in the kingdom of God: this KING has come because HE cares for each and every man, woman, and child, both

those in HIS kingdom and those who are outside of it and yet to come in. Here's the difference in the kingdom of God: this KING has come to give his life as a ransom, to "buy YOU back" from the kingdoms and 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 needs to be given a future and a hope and peace that will, like the kingdom, have no end.

This is the KING who would come to save His people. He will be called Jesus, remember, because he will "save" His people from their sins. And I declare to you this day—this holiday eve that is really a holy day—that Christ was born for you. Christ has died for you. Christ is risen for you. Christ will come again for you.

Finally, what did they name the baby? Yes, his name was Jesus, for he would save us from our sins. But our text gives us four throne names, typical of ancient kings. We don't have time this late into our festival sermon to unpack them all, but each one gives us a reminder of why this day, and this KING, are so special, so different, so "one of a kind."

In short, each pair has a name that could describe just another earthly king: counselor—every king was to be known by his wisdom and good counsel; mighty—every king was to be a good warrior; father—why we even call George Washington the "father of our nation"; and prince—yes, kings were princes when they were born.

But to each ordinary name is given the most extraordinary twist: a counselor who does "wonders"—not just great insight, like the proverbial wisdom of Solomon—but someone truly extraordinary, even with the power of God!

Not just a warrior, a war hero rightly honored for his valor, but the might of God himself, who conquers all foes, human, superhuman, and the principalities and powers of spiritual darkness.

A father, indeed, to whom we can pray, "Our father who art in heaven," for He is a father who is ours forever.

And yes, a prince, the prince who brings true and lasting peace, not like the world seeks and never finds, but that comes only from knowing THIS king of the kingdom of God.

Dear people of God, a king is born this night for you. Not just a sweet baby in a manger that did cry even though the popular hymn says he didn't; but 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." Luther reminds us that the kingdom will come, whether we pray for it or not, but we do pray that it may come among us.

Tonight, this Christmas Eve, the KING has come. His kingdom is among us. We are forever. Christ, the Savior is born. Christ, the King, is BORN for you!

In Jesus name. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior...our NEWBORN KING. Amen.