

Is 11 King

As we journey through advent we meditate on the coming of a King. And while I think we all know that cognitively, that Jesus is a King, I am not so convinced that it particularly means anything profound for us and our lives at times.

Which is odd because most of us over the age of, what, 30 or so, typically care at least a little bit about politics. We get in facebook fights, we watch the news, we wear our silly little “I voted” stickers. So we clearly care about who is leading us in some way.

And we are not alone in that. It was no different for people living in a monarchy, a country with a King. In fact it was probably even more important who the King was in a monarchy. In the Roman empire you could have Nero as emperor and you, Christian, yes you, would be at risk of being burned on a cross in his backyard. Or you could have Constantine, who was a Christian and supported the Church and called the council of Nicaea. Big difference. Who are you voting for? But that’s the rub isn’t it, they didn’t get a vote.

No one did. It was decided by birthright – unless you could, of course, find a way around that. And so we have the stories of assassination and military coups. And what if there was no heir for a king? So we have the tale of King Arthur and the Sword in the Stone. And what of a lost lineage, and so we have the Return of the

King. Stories of hope that God, or destiny, would pick a worthy king, a good one where there would be protection and peace for the people.

But there was little of that around in Israel on the first Advent. Could you imagine if your nation was captive to a foreign empire? Their soldiers, their taxes, their laws. Oh, and that law to some degree or another demanded worship of the emperor!

And God was supposed to be on your side. He had promised a king in the lineage of David forever. But there was no King, there was an upstart politician Herod, sure. But he wasn't the true king, he wasn't from David. And he had quite the fondness for murder. And you wonder why the Kingly line of David, of Jesse (David's Father) is said to be a stump.

Cut off. Hopeless. Because do you know who the rightful heir to the throne of Israel was that first Christmas and leading up to it? Joseph. Joseph should have been king, assuming he was the firstborn son. And if this was a show on HBO there would be plots and grand reveal of who this carpenter was and a battle! But no. None of that. Herod was killing anyone he thought might threaten his reign. And so Joseph worked in his shop, instead of sitting on a throne. That was what had become of the kingly line.

But there was a promise. A promise that a Savior, a Messiah, a King would come once more in power. A shoot comes from the stump of Jesse! The lineage is not dead! A King will come. Come to save the people, to lead them into protection and peace once more. And so we may gloss over Isaiah chapter 11, but I don't think those people of old did. A King would come! And he would be good, so good. Strong, but righteous!

So I suppose the question for them was, "It's been 400 years, why would he come now?" And then, "If he did come, how would we know?" And so Matthew's Gospel is full of the prophecies that Jesus fulfills. He is shouting from the rafters, "This is him, the king!" John the Baptist, the prophet, says the same.

But still some wouldn't believe. And how can we blame them? We think of the returning King with a sword and an army and some Hollywood cinematography doesn't hurt either. And for them, how could they not expect the King to be like David, a warrior? (Which is, possibly, why Isaiah says Jesus is the shoot of Jesse – not David the warrior king – but the lowly shepherd) Regardless, they saw Jesus with his twelve fishermen and tax collector followers. They saw Jesus who grew up in Nazareth and they said, "The King? The Messiah? No way."

And we play these same games too, trying to make The King fit our ways of the world. And so the memes say, "He fed the poor and healed people – he's a leftist."

And the other side cries out, “He likes life, and marriage, and families – He’s right.” Or, maybe, he’s the King and we should define our lives and systems through him and not the other way around.

And please don’t mishear me, this is not some cry for Christian nationalism, whatever that is, it’s a cry for us to acknowledge who the King of kings is and to first and foremost let that make it’s way into our lives as **good news** – not just marching orders.

It is good news that God sent a King to you. And if you are disenchanted about that, like the people who thought he was just a crazy guy from Nazareth, well, maybe ask some of the other people Jesus ran into. Ask Jairus, whose daughter was raised from the dead. Who do you think they worship? It isn’t Caesar. Ask Pilate, the most powerful man around, left haunted and perplexed by Jesus – “is there more going on with this King of the Jews?” Ask the centurion at the foot of the cross who cried out, “Surely this was the Son of God.” Ask the disciples in the upper room who see their Lord and King alive once more. Is that a King? Does he have power herod or Caesar, or the billionaires today could never dream of!? You better believe it.

That was a king they would follow to their deaths because, well, their King can beat that too. Why would you not follow him? And I think that question is the same for us today.

No other King, no other politician, however we dress them up, saves like Jesus. No other King is victorious over the dead and offers you that victory. No other King fights for you like Jesus did, taking your cross and sin. No other King.

And hopefully we begin to see that Jesus didn't come to lower our taxes, or get us better roads, or job security. Nor did he come promising to heal each hardship and calm each storm for us individually. He came to establish an eternal kingdom that no storm, no hardship, no interest rate, no border, no disease, no evil dictator, no devil, and no, not even death, can overthrow.

And that is good news. There is a Kingdom surpassing all nations and time. There is a throne above all thrones and powers. There is a kingdom that you are a citizen of through baptism, through faith. *You already have it's rights and privileges.* You already are forgiven, you already are living eternal life. You have already seen the victory blow dealt on the cross and resurrection, we know we cannot lose. God keeps his promises.

So why do we fret over such tiny things like wars, and economy, and heart attacks? What are those to the King of kings? I'm being flippant, a bit, yes. Those are scary

things, and we do have responsibilities as neighbors and citizens. But we get so worried about them! We fret and fight and stress. Why do we let ourselves get so distracted by these things? And I get it, “Jesus isn’t helping me pay the bills!”

Firstly, I’m not so sure – aren’t we to thank God for house, home, field and food?

And secondly, how is that any different from the people disenchanted with him

back then? “Wait you aren’t going to help us get rid of the romans!?” No, he is

going to help you get rid of the tool they use to oppress you, death. And he has

gotten rid of that for us too. So lets not get distracted. Bills, taxes, cancer, car

accidents. Those are scary, yes. But there is a greater kingdom, there is someone

stronger and you, who fear the Lord, are his. So fear not.

This advent and Christmas season lets celebrate that we have a King. A very real

one. Who loves you enough to fight for you, to die for you, and to bring you to

himself, even as he has not abandoned us here at all. Your King impacts your life

far more than you can imagine. Far more. From the heartbeats in your chest, to the

planets in orbit, to the quarks in the electrons, to the food on your table, to the

cancer or lack thereof in your body. And we say, “Oh its abstract, not a real

throne.” How narrow minded we are. If he is real, his throne is, his rule is. So hear

his Word, what he would have you do, yes, certainly – who would we be to say we

serve the king then blatantly ignore what he would have us do? But let us never

forget what he has done for us. He fought the fight, he conquered the grave. Go to

him, citizen of the kingdom, with your cares and fears, and receive from him strength, forgiveness, and promises of life. Promises that will come true because, well, who or what has the authority to undo them?