

Tuesday, December 24, 2019 - Christmas Eve
“Royal Baby Names”

Isaiah 9: 2-7

Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Central Image - Single Focus

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

We know the waiting and anticipation of a royal birth. Here in the US we don't have a king but look at how closely people followed the many royal births of the past decade, the children of William and Harry who brought their own special fanfare back in the 80s. Now we've got George and Charlotte and Louis and then this year, Archie came along. Everyone wants to know about the royal baby(ies).

But you know even the British crown isn't what you had in the ancient world of an absolutist ruler - the king and his dynasty were everything and intimately impacted the lives of their subjects. I think of Henry VIII and his obsession over having a male heir. Not only was the king himself the sole center and essence of his kingdom (selfishly so) but everything revolved around his legacy, a dynasty that would go through a son.

So royal pregnancies are a big deal. You can hear the well-known words of our text as a royal birth announcement. And well-timed, too because it is written to a people under siege by more powerful nations around them, wondering - will our kingdom last? Their hopes and dreams are pinned on the future birth of a prince, and the continuation of a dynasty.

“Unto us a child is born”... (but is it a boy? Yes...) “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 kingdom 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 uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forever more.”

But then a striking reminder - less for the people back then who should have already known their king and kingdom wasn't like other kingdoms. This was God's kingdom after all! And so the announcement continues, “The zeal of the Lord - Yahweh - will do this!”

Our culture was founded on overthrowing a king and establishing a society “of the people, by the people and for the people.” We’re fans of checks and balances, leery of the danger of an overbearing monarch, fearful of a government lying on *any* one person’s shoulders. We may even imagine that the zeal of Yahweh means God’s going to do whatever’s best by us. There’s a temptation to think God is on our side - individually, collectively - to give us the life 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 we’re involved in something unique, grounded on our relationship with God. While much of the world around us at least recognizes something of who we are and what we’re about as Christmas people - celebrating the birth of Jesus - we celebrate today what it means for us in the kingdom of God to hear that a king is born!

See, today is a royal birth for the subjects of the kingdom! It means for one thing that the kingdom is secured, at least for another generation. Does it feel that way to you? Is the kingdom secured? There’s a prominent “decline narrative” common among Christians... it’s in the way we talk, the way we act... that is, the world is in decline, falling apart at the seams, the sky is falling, going you know where in a handbasket... and to be sure, Scripture talks about things being harder for the Church before Jesus comes again... but I also know that when we succumb to this narrative fear gets in the driver seat, such that maybe God isn’t up to the task of His God-stuff anymore. And there are many a person ready to capitalize on that fear, take advantage, and work us into a frenzy. Jesus tells us, “See that you are not alarmed” before He tells us the way it’ll be. Friends, remember this is not just some other kingdom - this is the kingdom of God. A kingdom not of this world. The zeal of Yahweh will do this, has done this already - in fact, it’s God Himself who comes as our king - and Christmas day - and every day to follow - is a day to celebrate! Long live the King!

There’s no end to the increase of His rule or of peace! More than just another generation, it’s forever... same with justice and righteousness established now and forever. That’s why we celebrate today not just as another holiday, or even a national holiday, with

traditional foodstuffs and travel plans so similar to that Thanksgiving Day we celebrated not even a month ago - today is the day of a Kingdom of God spreading not just here, but everywhere - not like the nations, but for all nations!

Next, the king is truly the essence of the kingdom. Boris Johnson is a way bigger deal to what happens next in Brexit than Queen Elizabeth, but not so in the kingdom of God. In His kingdom, everything revolves around Him... but not selfishly, not to soothe his ego like Henry the VIII or to stoke his paranoia like Herod or to imagine divine qualities in himself like the Emperor of Rome or Pharaoh of Egypt. This kingdom, revolving all around the king is about a king who comes to serve, not to be served. He came for you! For me! He cares that much about every man, woman and child - those already in His kingdom and those who aren't in it yet. He gave His own life to buy you back from every other "kingdom and power" wanting to control you - whether that's the temptations in yourself, your personal sin or any other thing the world offers to us, trying to get us to let the world revolve around "me and what I want."

In fact, that's why this king came - because you have needs, needs you could never hope to achieve on your own. You need to be loved, you need to be saved, you need to be rescued, you need a future and a hope and peace that will, like the kingdom and its king, have no end.

That's the royal baby we celebrate today, with way more fanfare than all the magazines, tabloids and paparazzi can muster. He will be called Jesus, remember, because He will "save" His people from their sins. Christ came for you. Died for you. Rose for you. Calls you by the Gospel, sends you as disciples, to love others and disciple others - the method by which His kingdom keeps increasing. And Christ will come again, too - for you and all His kingdom.

You know all that speculation - what will they name the baby? We've seen breathless speculation every time William and Kate, Harry and Meghan are having another baby. The Nevada Gaming Control Board regulates what types of futures can be bet upon. They've

determined sports... but in Britain you can bet on current events, including royal baby names - and there was heavy betting on that. The people want to know - it's of great interest!

We now know, His name is Jesus - for He would save us from our sins. But our text also gives us four throne names, typical of ancient kings. We don't have the time this late into the sermon to unpack them all but each one gives us a reminder of why this day and this king are so different, so special, so "one of a kind."

In short, each pair has a name that could describe just another earthly king. Every king needs a counselor - to share wisdom. Mighty - every king needs to be a good warrior, or strategist or tactician - something of military smarts has to be brought to the table for success. Every good king needs to be father, even if only in disposition toward the people - we even refer to the "Founding Fathers" in our country. Every king is first a prince when born. But for this king, every name is given a twist - a counselor who does wonders. A warrior who's not just a war hero but has the might of God himself, to knock even the spiritual forces of darkness off their axis. A father, to whom we can pray, "Our Father" - because Jesus makes Him ours, too, with more approachability and personal connection than our own earthly fathers are capable. And a prince who brings a different kind of peace, the peace the world is always striving for but never finds, unless if in Jesus.

So this Christmas I announce to you again - a king is born! Not just a sweet baby in a manger, a king who will rule forever. He came humbly, holy - for you and for me. His name is Jesus. He is the Christ - our Savior is born! In Jesus' name, Amen.