

The One True King

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost ~July 6, 2003

Sermon Background Study

Scripture Passages

Luke 2:8-11 (NRSV)

⁸In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: ¹¹to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”

John 20:26-31 (NRSV)

²⁶A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.” ²⁸Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!” ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Today, we continue a nine-week sermon series on all the symbols in our glorious Rose Window. Our eighth symbol is the king's crown, reminding us that Jesus is the King of Kings.

Given that our symbol for this week is the crown, a symbol of royalty, our scripture passages may seem a bit odd. There was no crown on the baby. Kings aren't born in stables. There are no royal references here – or are there?!

No room at the top!

In Jesus' day, all regions surrounding the Mediterranean were ruled by Rome and Rome was ruled by Caesar. The Roman Republic was only a memory; Rome was now an empire ruled by a dictator. Caesar¹ was unchallenged in his authority. Indeed, by the time of Jesus, Caesar was taking on the status of divinity! In the Roman Empire, when a great military victory was won or an heir was born to Caesar or a successor took the throne, messengers (heralds) would be sent out to the provinces carrying this good news, the *evangelion*.²



The Crown

The crown in the rose window is a symbol of God as king. From their very beginnings, the people of God knew that God was sovereign and exercised royal dominion over them and all creation. Indeed, God was their king. Even when God allowed Israel to have a human king, Israel was akin to a constitutional monarchy. The ultimate authority in Israel was God, whose covenant set limits on the king's power.

By Jesus' day, Israel had not had a true king from David's family for nearly 600 years. The long hoped for Messiah was to be a true King, lifted up by God to rule in power over God's kingdom and a restored Israel. Thus, Paul would refer to Jesus as “he who is the blessed and only sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Timothy 6:15).

¹ Caesar Augustus was emperor at the time of Jesus' birth. His successor, Tiberius, was Caesar during Jesus' public ministry. Pontius Pilate was a Prefect in Tiberius' administration. Later in the first century, some Christians were executed for their unwillingness to worship Caesar.

² For example, part of an inscription from 9BC refers to Augustus as “a savior for us and those who come after us” and goes on to say “the birthday of the god [Augustus] was the beginning for the world of the glad tidings [evangelion/good news] that have come to men through him . . .” Sounds a lot like the announcement of the herald angels at Jesus' birth doesn't it!

The “glad tidings/good news/gospel/*evangelion*” brought by the herald angels at Jesus’ birth is a royal announcement, proclaiming the birth of the Lord. This proclamation sets the stage for a reality-changing confrontation. There could be only one Lord, one true king, in the Empire. Would it be Jesus or would it be Caesar? The confrontation continues to this day. To whom does our allegiance rightfully belong?

God as King

When God formed a people, through Abraham, and redeemed them from slavery in Egypt, through Moses, God made it quite clear that he was to rule over his people. From their earliest days as a nation struggling to conquer Canaan, Israel was a theocracy with God as their king. But, desiring to be like the nations around them, they asked relentlessly that God would give them a human king. Eventually God does relent and instructs the prophet Samuel to give them a king saying “they have rejected me from being king over them” (1 Samuel 8:7). Their first king is Saul, who proves to be unworthy and is replaced by David, who would go on to become Israel’s greatest, even idealized, king. God makes a covenant with David that someone from his house, his lineage, would always sit on the throne of Israel. But in 587BC Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed and David’s line comes to a seeming end.

By Jesus’ day, the Jews had been without a rightful king for nearly 600 years! For all those centuries, the Jews had hung onto God’s promises of a restored Israel and a returning king, the Messiah, the anointed one of God.³ The early Christians proclaimed that Jesus was the hoped for Messiah. He was born in Bethlehem, the city of David’s birth. He could trace his lineage through David’s house.⁴ Messengers came bearing a royal announcement of Good News, as if Jesus was Caesar himself! Throughout Jesus’ ministry, he said things and did things that laid claim to

Thomas

It is a little ironic that “doubting Thomas” is one of the most-remembered disciples of Jesus. But perhaps this is as it should be, for all Christians are beset by doubts from time to time. After all, we do make the most extraordinary claims!

Thomas is not mentioned much in the Gospels, though he alone had the strength to urge the disciples to follow Jesus into hostile Judea (John 11:16). Thomas wasn’t with the other disciples when Jesus first came to them on Sunday evening and scoffed at the idea that Jesus had been bodily resurrected. Nonetheless, Jesus came to his disciples a week later when Thomas was there and Thomas saw Jesus’ wounds for himself.

kingship. His triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was the entry of a returning king. Jesus was mocked as “king of Jews” because even the Romans understood his claim. After his death and resurrection, Jesus’ followers would call him the “King of Kings” (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14 & 19:16).

Jesus as Lord

God’s name, YHWH, was so powerful and holy that the Jews wouldn’t say it. When they read the Hebrew scriptures and came across God’s name, they would say *adonai*, meaning Lord, emphasizing God’s sovereignty over all creation. In the same way, the followers of Jesus called him Lord. Paul once wrote “yet for us there is one God, from whom all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6). Referring to Jesus as the “Lord Jesus Christ” is much like saying “King Jesus, the Messiah.”

Jesus is the Lord, the one true king . . . not Caesar or whomever else, or whatever else, we might think. Jesus lays rightful claim to us, to our lives, to all we have and do. There can be no half measures in the presence of the king. Thomas’ response when he touched the wounded hands of the risen Christ must be our own: “My Lord and My God!”

³ Kings of Israel were anointed with oil. *Mashia* is “anointed one” in Hebrew and gives us our word “Messiah.” Christ is from the Greek word, *christos*, which translates *mashia* in the Hebrew. So, “anointed one” = Messiah = Christ. Every time the Christians referred to Jesus as “Christ” it had royal connotations.

⁴ This is an important point of Matthew’s opening chapter. Jesus’ genealogy places him firmly within the context of Israel’s history and within David’s house, to which Jesus could lay legal claim through his earthly father, Joseph.

Daily Bible Readings

Before reading each passage, take a few minutes to get a sense of the context. Your study bible should help. Jot down a few questions that come to mind from your reading of the passage.

<p>Day 1 Isaiah 6 God, the King, in his heavenly throne room</p>	<p>Day 2 Psalm 21 A royal psalm; the King of Israel trusts in the Lord God</p>
<p>Day 3 Matthew 18:23-35 A king teaches about mercy in his kingdom</p>	<p>Day 4 John 11:7-11; 20:19-29 Thomas' strength, doubts, and confession</p>
<p>Day 5 Revelation 4:1-5:14 John's vision of God on his throne and Christ's exaltation as the worthy lamb</p>	<p>Weekly Prayer Concerns</p>

Sermon Notes

Scott Engle's new SS class begins next Sunday, July 13!!

Next Sunday, July 13, we'll kick-off a new adult Sunday School class at the 9:30 hour. The class will be led by Scott Engle, the author of these background studies. The class will be open to all adults and will be based on the Sunday morning sermon series and background studies. It will be a lecture-oriented class, but there will be plenty of time for questions and answers. We will meet in Room 4 of Piro Hall on the Garden Level of the new sanctuary. Please join us!

This Tuesday night, July 8, is the lecture on "Hope."

This Tuesday night, July 8, is the second in our St. Andrew Summer Lecture Series – "Faith, Hope, and Love" presented by Scott Engle. We will gather at 6:45 in Room 4 of Piro Hall on the Garden Level of the new sanctuary. You can enter the building through one of the west side doors. Registration is not required. Childcare will be available by reservation – call 214-291-8024. For more info go to www.standrewccl.org.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. The question is simple; the challenge is not. Who (or what!) is the Lord of your life? Before you answer too quickly, consider this: How would others answer that question about you? What evidence would there be of our true allegiances? How we spend our time or our money? Who we hang around with? Our behavior toward others? Make a list of the evidence we might collect about someone if we want to know their real priorities and allegiance. Market researchers tell us that, when it comes to how they spend their time or money, there is little difference between those who profess to be Christians and those who do not. Does this surprise you? Make a list of explanations for this. Do you think that this is what Jesus envisioned for his new creations?
2. In coming to confess that Jesus was truly his Lord and God, Thomas had to overcome his own doubts. Frankly, he simply didn't believe that Jesus had been resurrected – not until he saw and touched Jesus' crucifixion scars for himself. When he came to trust in the risen Jesus, everything changed for him. Most Christians will admit to having doubts from time to time. Are you ever troubled by doubts? What sorts of doubts? We can't very well touch Jesus' scars – how do we overcome our doubts? How do we live with them?