

The Coming of the King

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[0 : 00] Well, as most of you here already know, Advent is that season leading up to Christmas where we prepare our hearts to celebrate the birth of Jesus. And during this season, we often go back, as we were just singing, to reflect on how things were before Jesus came.

We think about the darkness. We think about the upheaval. We think about the brutality and the conquest of the years before his first coming. We think about the people of Israel. We think about God's patient love.

We remember how time and time again God sent the messengers, prophets, to graciously call the people to repentance. It's all too easy to forget the darkness of those days.

I just happened to be in the Old Testament in my Bible reading this past week, and those days were awful. Wicked kings built altars and set up idols to other gods and worshipped them.

They even brought some of these idols and altars right into the temple of the Lord. They had male prostitutes in the temple of the Lord. They were sacrificing their children to Baal.

[1 : 17] The rich and the powerful were brutally oppressing the weak and the poor. And bloodshed and murder was rampant.

Finally, God said, enough is enough. They had repeatedly refused to listen to his call to repent that came through the prophets. And so God gave them into the hands of the Assyrian and Babylonian empires.

Many who survived went into exile, and they were scattered from their homeland. But God is so rich in mercy and grace and love, even towards sinners like you and me.

He brought the children of those who were exiled back to the land of Israel by moving the hearts of the most powerful rulers in the world at the time. And there they were, a small remnant of the people of Israel in the province of Judah, rebuilding Jerusalem and rebuilding the temple of the Lord amidst regional pressures and opposition, like a candle flame shining that just will not be snuffed out.

And again, God sent them a prophet, a man named Zechariah, some 500 years before the birth of the Messiah. Imagine yourself there in the streets of Jerusalem, the once glorious city now looking better, but still very much under construction.

[2 : 51] Feel the anxiety and the uncertainty of those days when a neighboring city or people could just kind of come out armed for battle at any time looking for plunder.

And imperial taxes consumed so much of what you had worked for each month. And here's this weirdo, Zechariah, in the midst of all this, saying, This is what the Lord, Yahweh Almighty, says.

Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion. Shout, daughter Jerusalem. See, your king comes to you.

Righteous and victorious.

Lowly and riding on a donkey. On a colt. The foal of a donkey. I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war horses from Jerusalem and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea. And from the river to the ends of the earth.

[4 : 14] This was God's message to the remnant of Israel and Judah 500 years before the Messiah's birth. Rejoice. Shout for joy. Shout for joy.

Why? Because, said Zechariah, your king is coming. A king not like the wicked kings of old. This king will be the righteous king.

Not like the kings of old who again and again were defeated in battle. This king will be victorious over all enemies. Over all who would dare to come against him. Doesn't that sound wonderful for a people living in dark and dangerous times?

And what will this king accomplish? Through him, God will take away the chariots of Ephraim and the war horses of Jerusalem. He will break the battle bow.

These words paint a picture of how this king will put an end to war. No longer will there be need for these implements of war because conflict will cease.

[5 : 19] He, this king, will proclaim peace to the nations. He won't just be a local governor or a regional ruler.

He will usher in global peace. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river, kind of a reference to the Euphrates in those days, to the ends of the earth.

Zechariah appointed the people there in Jerusalem to a worldwide kingdom ruled by this king. What are you picturing as you hear this?

Perhaps a legendary conqueror, a man of great military prowess, courage and valor, riding his horse into battle with countless multitudes behind, armed and ready.

Is that what Zechariah sees in his vision from God? He says, See, your king comes to you righteous and victorious, lowly, and riding on a donkey.

[6 : 29] Now, I know this passage is a Palm Sunday favorite. Some of you might think I got the wrong holiday here. But it speaks to Christmas as well. The manner in which this king will come, says Zechariah, will be lowly and peaceful.

Not only is this fulfilled as Jesus rides into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, but it's fulfilled in Jesus' birth. Lowly. Jesus came not to the capital city of Jerusalem, but to the lowly Bethlehem, the shepherd's village.

He came not to a luxurious palace, but to a stable, because there was no room in the inn. His little crib was not finely crafted of exotic woods, but it was a feeding trough for animals.

And his royal birth announcement and first visitors were not kings and rulers, but sheep tenders. It seems that God has had it in his heart to surprise the world and to humble the proud by the way his Messiah came.

Lowly. And peaceful. What kind of God is this? This glorious creator promising to bring everlasting peace on earth in such a humble and gentle way.

[8 : 03] This is one of the many things we celebrate at Christmas. The birth of this very King. Jesus, the gentle and lowly. But there's another way that all this speaks to us today, all these years later.

You know, we live in different times, but in some ways the times are similar. We look out into the world and we see all kinds of darkness and upheaval, brutality, and even war in our world today. We look at the news. We lament at how things are going. We look at our government and leaders and we're often left wanting more. We see self-interest.

We see hypocrisy and even corruption. We see division in our communities, in our nations, tensions and conflict. We see the vitriol flowing back and forth between people on social media.

We see the war between Russia and Ukraine and tensions rising between China and other nations. and I could go on. Again, our hearts are drawn back to these words of Zechariah.

[9 : 17] We too are waiting for the advent of this King. Not His first coming, but His second and final coming. We're waiting for the day when this baby who was born in Bethlehem, now a man, will return from heaven and establish this peaceful kingdom from sea to sea to the ends of the earth.

A glorious global kingdom and not a kingdom won by vicious brutality, treachery, or lust, but a kingdom founded on goodness, righteousness, and love.

We are looking for the day when the weapons of war, bombs, missiles, artillery, tanks, will be taken away, broken, never needed again.

Do you know that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, the King, who will bring this to pass when He returns? This too is a part of what makes Christmas special.

It's not just the birth of a good man who died long ago that we celebrate. No. It's the birth of this King, this one, who died, yes, but rose again, who reigns on heaven's throne, and who one day, when He returns, will put our broken world to right.

[10 : 55] Do you long for the coming of this King, Jesus? Jesus. When Jesus came, His message was this, the time has come.

The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news. Have you done that? Have you put your hope, your faith, your trust in Jesus, the King?

Have you surrendered your life to Him? For when He comes, He will be King. Does He have your allegiance? Let's pray.

Father in heaven, we thank You for Your Word, which You spoke long ago, and that even though You said it so many years ago, thousands of years ago, it still speaks to us today.

We too are waiting. We too are longing for that day when Your Son will bust through the clouds in glory and bring this world to its grand finale, its good and rightful close.

[12 : 14] And I pray that in anticipation of that day, each one of us would be ready. Each one of us would have a firm faith in You and know You and be Your servants.

I pray that you will find faith here in Davidson on the earth when You return. Bless us now, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. I'll invite the worship team to come back and we'll sing one more song. Thank you.