

### In Pursuit of a King Part 3

We continue our Advent series today. Two weeks ago we talked about the wise men who followed a star and came in pursuit of a king. Last week we talked about another God-seeker, Simeon, who went daily to the temple in pursuit of finding the Messiah, the new born king. He had been given a promise that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah, the hope of Israel, the light to the gentiles. He lived his life in pursuit of the king, but just what kind of king were these men pursuing? Nothing about the birth of this king and nothing about his life seemed to fit with what would be expected of a king. And this king was called the King of Kings, born to rule and reign over all, every person, every nation, every power and principality. What kind of king is this?

To be honest, we Americans don't have a good sense of what a king is all about do we? We kicked the last king out in 1776 right? My ideas and understandings of kings and royalty come from history, tv and movies. Earthly kings are typically surrounded by riches, wealth, pomp and pageantry, living in luxury in palaces, surrounded by servants, guarded by strangely uniformed security, protected from the common folks over whom they rule.

At the time of Jesus' birth, Herod the Great was on the throne and though he was referred to as a King of Israel, he actually served the Roman Emperor. Herod was all the things a corrupt earthly king could be: cruel, selfish, egotistical, constantly scheming to gain and maintain power and control, jealous, threatened by any rival or contender to his throne, even to the point of having his own heirs, his own sons killed. That's the kind of king the people in Jesus' day were familiar with, so when the Magi came to town asking "where is the king of the Jews?" the people must have thought, "Oh great, another one" or, "what kind of king will this one be?" When we look at the bible we discover he is a very different kind of king. (For more of what I'm sharing this morning, read Gayle Erwin's book *The Jesus Style*.) **What kind of king is this?**

**Born in a stable.** You would think for the most unique birth of the most unique person to ever live on this planet, (after all he was born of a virgin, conceived of the Holy Spirit and was fully God and fully man – that qualifies him as unique) he would be born someplace special. God could have set a modern hospital on a hilltop somewhere outside Bethlehem, staffed it with doctors and nurses with Mary as the only patient and Jesus could have been born there. Instead, he was born in a stable. What a strange place for a king to be born, a place reserved for animals, surrounded by all the sights and sounds and smells that accompany a barn yard. Sarah said

Sunday night she was grateful the nativity scene isn't a scratch and sniff display. No doctors, no royal attendants. No mention is made of a midwife although it is likely that someone came to help. No royal crib, instead he is wrapped and placed in what was likely a stone feeding trough. Some of you might have been born at home, but I doubt any of you were born in a barn or stable! Not even born in Jerusalem, the city of God. Instead he was born in this humble little town of Bethlehem. His birth had people wondering, what kind of king is this?

**Questions concerning his parents.** Mary and Joseph were lovely people, no doubt, but there was this issue of timing and Mary's pregnancy. They were engaged but not yet married when the angel appeared to Mary and told her she would conceive and have a son and call his name Jesus. You can read it in Luke 1. "How can this be since I am a virgin?" she asked. The angel told her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and this child will be called the son of God...For nothing is impossible with God." But not everyone believed her story.

Matthew tells us when Joseph found out Mary was pregnant he didn't know what to think. Being a righteous man and not wanting to publicly humiliate Mary, which would have been the response of a lot of men, he sought to "put her away secretly". The betrothal or engagement was a legal action that required a legal divorce or dissolution to end it. It took an angel appearing to Joseph in a dream to assure him this child was of the Holy Spirit and that he was to go ahead and take Mary as his wife, which he did but didn't have marital relations with her until after Jesus' birth.

Others would know this story and the problem with the timing. Jesus' enemies could have brought this up. Recall that under Old Testament law, (Deut. 23) an illegitimate child was excluded from the assembly of the Lord. Although we know Jesus was not illegitimate, others may not have known or believed Mary and Joseph's story. He was born with something of a scandal hanging over him. "I heard his parents weren't even married when his mom got pregnant." From his birth Jesus identified with the outcast, the rejected, the illegitimate, the scandalized and the scorned. It left people wondering, what kind of King is this?

**Political refugee/asylum seeker.** We hear much about refugees, asylum seekers fleeing corrupt governments and violence and coming to America. Jesus was a refugee. Herod sent soldiers to Bethlehem to kill all the boys under the age of two. Matthew tells us Joseph was warned in a dream. **"Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt and stay there until I bring you word: for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy him."**

**Matthew 2:13.** They sought asylum in Egypt and lived there until the death of Herod. Jesus is a king who understands the life of a refugee, an alien. He understands being a minority in a prominent culture. Matthew says this fulfilled an Old Testament prophecy, “Out of Egypt I called my son.” Hosea 11:1 It made people wonder, what kind of king is this?

**Questionable ancestry.** Both Matthew and Luke give an account of the genealogy of Jesus. Mary and Joseph could trace their ancestry back to King David. Nothing questionable about that. Impressive ancestry. It’s like going on ancestry.com and discovering you’re related to royalty. “I always knew it: royal blood!” But as you look back through the list of ancestors for Jesus you discover a few skeletons in the royal closet. Not all of Jesus’ ancestors were Jewish by birth. Ruth was a Moabite, (descendants of Moabites were excluded from the assembly of the Lord also) Rahab was a Canaanite and some suggest she might have been a prostitute. That doesn’t look too good on your royal resume. Look at some of Jesus’ other ancestors. Jacob was a schemer, a deceiver and a cheat. Judah, the father of twins Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar (his daughter in law). Their story would be more apt to be told on Dateline but you can find it in Genesis 38. Rated PG for mature audiences. What about King David? Finally, a decent guy, a man after God’s own heart, except he was guilty of adultery and a cover-up that led to murder; his hands were so bloody God wouldn’t let him build the temple. It was a pretty messed up family tree. It made people wonder, what kind of king is this?

**His birth announcement.** I know this was pretty spectacular, after all, angels announced his birth - choirs of heavenly angels singing “Glory to God in the highest.” That’s the ultimate gender reveal. But look at who the angels announced to: Shepherds. Not heads of state, not other kings or prime ministers or Emperors but shepherds. Who were they going to tell? Sheep? Other shepherds? In fact, they told everyone who would listen. “It’s good news, – a Savior is born, a Savior for even people like us.” We expect good news for wise men, for the rich and famous, but good news for the poorest and the lowest. What kind of king is this, that his birth announcement is delivered to shepherds? But it’s good news, even for shepherds!

**His physical appearance.** The king in the movies is always the handsomest guy, big and strong. You’ve all seen the paintings or movies of Jesus, right? A 6 ft. tall Englishman with blonde hair and blue eyes. Yeah, that’s not him. Anthropologists say the average height of a first century Jewish male was probably around 5’4”. Let’s say he was 5’6”, probably dark complexion. The prophet Isaiah spoke prophetically of the Messiah and said “**He had no**

**beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” Isaiah 53:2** The bible said King Saul stood head and shoulders above everyone else in Israel. David was said to be handsome, of a ruddy complexion. Women seemed to swoon over David. But apparently there was nothing about Jesus’ appearance that made him stand out in a crowd. How do we know that besides what Isaiah said? One time people in his hometown tried to throw him off a cliff but he managed to just slip through the crowd. No one shouted, “there he goes!” because he just blended in with the people. Nothing special in appearance. When Judas betrayed Jesus in the garden he told the temple authorities, “He’ll be the one I kiss.” He wasn’t taller than others or Judas would have said, “arrest the tallest guy.” He didn’t glow in the dark or have a halo or Judas would have said, ‘Oh, you’ll know him. Just get the guy you can see in the dark.” No one was intimidated by him or his physical presence like they had been with Saul, or David, or Herod. It left people wondering, what kind of king is this?

**His hometown.** It helped if a king was born in a place of prominence, a place that held stature among cities and nations. Jesus’ hometown was Nazareth. A tiny little village. It had such a poor reputation that when one of his future disciples, Nathaniel, was told where Jesus was from, he remarked **“Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” John 1:46** Jesus grew up as a refugee in Egypt and then on the wrong side of the tracks in Israel. He grew up in the projects of Galilee. It made people wonder, what kind of king is this?

**His possessions.** Kings should be wealthy. They should own property, palaces, hunting lodges, summer homes, but Jesus had nothing. He had no home of his own. Jesus said, **“Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” Luke 9:58.** He owned one suit of clothes, one robe they gambled over at his death, but nothing more. Ownership and material possession are keys to impressing people and controlling people, both then and now. He could have impressed us since the bible says his father owns the cattle on a thousand hills, but he also could have intimidated us with his wealth and his possessions. Instead, he owned nothing. He became poor so we could become rich in His grace. It makes us wonder, what kind of king is this?

**His work record.** Kings are expected to do kingly things, to pursue kingly interests, yet Jesus was found among the common people. When he preached in his hometown the people asked **“What’s this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn’t he the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son?” Mark 6:3.** In Matthew’s account (13:53) they asked,

“Isn’t this the carpenter’s son?” He didn’t act like a king. He worked as a carpenter alongside Joseph. He didn’t expect to be served or treated like a king. It left people wondering, “what kind of king is this?”

What kind of king indeed. Paul explains, **“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross!”** **Philippians 2:5-8**

This king was in very nature God, yet he didn’t consider equality with God something to be grasped. He didn’t have to try to prove to anyone that he was God in the flesh. He didn’t have to have trappings of power and authority around him. No palace, no armies, no enforcers, no secret police. That was all the Jews had ever seen from the king and those in authority over them. But Jesus the king was different. What kind of king is this?

This king made of himself nothing Paul says. One translation says he emptied himself. He laid aside his might and power and glory. He wasn’t worried about maintaining his reputation or his appearance. He was seen eating with sinners, with prostitutes and drunkards and Roman collaborators, with lepers and Samaritans, with the outcasts of society, the nothing and nobodies. That’s the kind of king Jesus is. What kind of king is this?

Paul said King Jesus took upon himself the very nature of a servant. The same Greek word used to say he was in very nature God is used to say he was in very nature servant. He is the King who becomes servant, the king who leaves behind reputation, steps away from the throne and takes up the bowl and the towel to become the servant of all.

What kind of king is this? We get the answer in Paul’s words: He is the king that was born to die. He became obedient to death, even death on a cross. Here’s the ultimate answer to our question. What kind of king is this? The kind who came to die as the sacrifice for our sins. The kind who became a curse for us so we could receive the blessings of God.

What kind of king is this? The kind who knew no sin, who was perfect and sinless, and yet **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”** **2 Corinthians 5:21**. What kind of King is this? Matthew tells us, **“The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many?”** **Matthew 20:28** The kind who comes to serve and offer himself as a ransom,

exchanging his life for ours! What kind of king is this? The prophet Isaiah said he was the kind that was numbered with the transgressors and bore the sins of many. The kind that was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquity and sin, the kind that took our punishment, our chastisement so we could have peace, the kind that took stripes upon his back so we could be healed and made whole.

What kind of king is this? The wise men sought him, wondering what kind of king has a star to point the way to him. The shepherds came to see what kind of King would have his birth announced to people like them. What kind of king? The kind that was crucified on Calvary's cross, bearing our sin, our shame, our guilt, our reproach so we could go free, our sins forgiven. What kind of king? The kind that was buried in a borrowed tomb but on the third day rose from the dead. He's the kind of king that a grave can't hold and death can't keep and hell can't stop!

What kind of king is he? One like the world had never seen before. A king that was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on the cross as a sacrifice for sin and a substitute for sinners and rose again victorious over death, hell and the grave. He isn't just A king. John saw this king in his ascended glory and heard him declare he was the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. He was and is the Living One, the one who was dead and who is alive and lives forever and ever. He isn't just another king, John saw him wearing a robe dipped in blood and with this name written on it: **"KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS"**

#### **Revelation 19:16**

What kind of king is he? The kind who is preparing a place for his people and then is coming again to take his people home to be with him forever. The bible says **"For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."** 1 Thessalonians 4:16

There is no other king like King Jesus! The passage we read from Philippians 2 tells us that because Jesus was obedient to the point of dying on the cross for us and for our sins, **"God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."** Philippians 2:9-11

Exalted to the highest place! King of Kings and Lord of Lords! This is who he is! This is the kind of king Jesus is. The kind that loves you and won't stop loving you. The kind that invites you to come to him today and find him to be Savior and Prince of Peace and Lord of your life. He is the king that has promised to never leave you and never forsake you. He is with you, whatever your circumstances, whatever you are facing, whatever you are dealing with. He is the king who brings healing and restores hope, who mends broken hearts and broken marriages and broken lives. What kind of king is this? He is a king like no other. The kind of king who will deliver you and set you free. The kind of king you can trust, the kind who is always faithful and true. I invite you to open your heart to him and invite the King of Kings to ascend to the throne of your life. You will never regret it and you will never be the same!