

THE EAGER EXPECTATION OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Eager to See the King

Dear Friends in Christ,

These special midweek advent services are intended each year to assist you as you prepare your heart to properly celebrate our Savior's coming into this world to bring salvation. Yes, this is your church's way to help you focus on the spiritual side of Christmas, to help you concentrate on the real "Reason for the Season."

This Advent we have looked at the Eager Expectation of God's People for the Savior's arrival. Just think of how the anticipation built over the passage of time, thousands of years, from the first promise of a Savior, made in the Garden of Eden, to the birth of the Savior in a stable in Bethlehem. During that first Advent Season, from Adam and Eve to Christmas Eve, God's people waited in eager expectation for the promised Savior.

During that long time of waiting, God's people were instructed by the prophets who told them the coming Savior would be the Messiah, the Anointed One, anointed to serve a three-fold office. And so they were eager: Eager to Hear the PROPHET, Eager to Trust the PRIEST and today we hear that they were Eager to See the KING.

There could be no doubt that the eagerly expected Savior would be a king. Just listen to this prophecy about the Messiah from Isaiah 9:7 *Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.*

As the long time of waiting drew to a close, there may have been some from among God's people who didn't know or understand that the Messiah would be a prophet, THE Prophet in fact, spoken of by Moses. There may also have been some who didn't know or understand that the Messiah would be THE Great High Priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. But all who eagerly expected the Savior Messiah knew and understood that the Messiah would be a king, and not just any king, THE King whose rule would extend "*from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.*" (Zechariah 9:10, Psalm 72:8 NIV).

A king, a powerful, victorious, mighty king is just what the people were looking for. It's what they were eagerly expecting because when Jesus was born, his homeland chafed under the oppressive rule of the Roman Empire. We pastors often convey this thought in sermons and Bible classes with an almost 'formulaic' statement. "The people in Jesus' day were looking for a Messiah who was an earthly leader, not a spiritual leader, someone who would drive the Roman legions from their soil and release them from the tyranny of Roman rule." Formulaic or not, it's the truth. The people of Jesus' day were looking for an earthly leader.

And the many prophecies about the Messiah seemed to support their expectation. Of the Messiah it was prophesied 'The nations would be his inheritance, the ends of the earth his possession. He would rule with an iron scepter.' (Psalm 2:6-9). 'He would reign wisely and do what is just and right. In his days Judah would be saved and Israel would live in safety.' (Jeremiah 23:5-6). Sounds like someone who's going to be a liberator from foreign oppression. 'He would be the King of Glory, strong and mighty in battle' (Psalm 24:8), a military hero.

When Jesus of Nazareth, who claimed to be the Messiah, did not meet these expectations of his people, they rejected him. John 1:11, *He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.* Jesus was not the kind of Messiah the Jewish people were looking for. He was certainly not the kind of king the Jewish people

thought they needed. I equate the misunderstanding and rejection of Jesus by the Jewish people to an incident I once experienced.

Many years ago, before entering the ministry, I interviewed for a position with a highly-regarded firm and I was hired. The first thing the boss told me was the salary they would pay me. It was a lot of money in those days, and that's all I could think about. I wasn't really listening when he said, "We work from 6:30 in the morning until 6 at night." I was thinking about the money. He went on to say, "We work every Saturday from 6:30 in the morning till noon." But I didn't hear that because I was thinking about the money. Then he added, "We expect you to bill at least 40 hours a week to begin with, and to bill 50 hours or more a week after the first six months." That was a daunting task for someone right out of school, but it didn't register with me because I was thinking about the money.

Through the prophets God clearly told his Old Testament people that the promised Messiah would be a king and that's all they heard. God went on to tell his people this king "*. . . will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice. . .*" Isaiah 42:2-3. But the people were only focusing on the fact that the Messiah would be a king. When the prophet Isaiah said the Messiah would be pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities it didn't register with the people because they were only thinking about a Messiah who would be king. The people did not understand that the Messiah would be a suffering servant because they were only interested in the Messiah who would rule on King David's throne forever.

But Jesus the King did not enter our world to liberate his homeland or establish an earthly rule. In his exchange with the Roman governor Pontius Pilate Jesus said, "*You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.*" John 18:37 (NIV). But then Jesus said, "*My kingdom is not of this world . . . my kingdom is from another place.*"

What the people of Jesus' day did not understand is that their sense of what needed to be overthrown was way too small. They wanted the might and power of the Roman Empire defeated. But Jesus came to defeat something much more powerful than all the legions of Rome. He came to defeat sin and death and the devil. Jesus put aside his glory and majesty and became one of us. He took on our flesh and blood so that he might offer himself as the acceptable payment for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. With his resurrection from the grave we have proof of his victory. We are free from the guilt and punishment of sin. Death no longer is something we fear, it's the doorway to eternal life. The devil is a defeated foe who can be resisted. And by the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus establishes his kingdom of grace in the hearts of believers.

As God's people today, confident of the forgiveness of our sins, we eagerly await the celebration of the Savior's first coming. We are reminded of the ways Jesus comes to us now as King and rules in our hearts by his Word. The kingdom of grace, Christ's rule in the hearts of believers, is unseen and spiritual. It is not temporal but eternal. The rule of King Jesus in the hearts of believers is not to enslave us but to free us from slavery to sin. Those of us whose hearts are ruled by the Savior can now offer willing service to God and to our neighbor. We can witness his love to all those who are outside his kingdom. We can serve him and worship him as Lord and King.

Even so this Advent Season, we look forward in eager expectation for our King Jesus to come to earth again, a second time, a final time. When Jesus returns on Judgment Day there will be no doubt that he is King and Lord of all. On that day he will be "*revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.*" (2 Thessalonians 1:7). Revelation 1:7, "*. . . every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him.*" He comes for a purpose. In the book of Jude (vv.14-15) we read, "*See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly . . .*"

In eager expectation, believers in Jesus look forward to the day of Jesus' return in judgment. Clothed in his righteousness, we stand before him redeemed, restored and forgiven. It is then that our King will usher us into his heavenly kingdom, the Kingdom of Glory, where we will be 'forever with the Lord.' Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen.