

December 24, 2020 – 2 Samuel 7:8,12-16 & Luke 2:1-20

Growing up, there was a Christian radio station that had a Christmas Eve tradition. Like many radio stations, all through December they would play Christmas music. Being a Christian station, these were mainly carols and hymns. But there was a wide variety in their playlist.

But then, on Christmas Eve, they would play one specific thing every year: a recording of Handel's Messiah. A beautiful piece of music that we often associate with Christmas. Even though, actually, it's about the entire life of Christ. His birth is just one portion of it.

I still remember leaving Christmas Eve worship at church, getting into the car, and turning on the radio. Of getting into the house and turning it on in the background as we opened presents into the wee hours of the morning. Back then, I didn't appreciate it nearly as much as I do today. Now, I've gotten to actually sing in choirs that performed Handel's Messiah. There's nothing quite like it.

I think most everybody has heard it at some point in their lives. Or, at the very least, you've heard the Hallelujah chorus. The booming, soul stirring sound of layer upon layer of harmonized voices, repeating the word "Hallelujah" at the top of their lungs.

But my favorite part actually comes just after that. As all those voices split and weave in and out of each other, with the words, "And he shall reign forever and ever. And he shall reign forever and ever..." Over and over again. One overlapping the other. It gives me chills every time I hear it.

The lyrics are simple, but profound. Like most everything else in the Hallelujah Chorus, they're taken from the book of Revelation. Chapter 11, to be specific. But the thing is, they could have been taken just as easily from our Old Testament lesson today.

Here we have a message from God to King David through the prophet Nathan. David has just gone to Nathan with the suggestion that he build the Lord a grand Temple in the city of Jerusalem. An idea which Nathan initially thinks is a very good one.

However, God comes to Nathan during the night. And he says, first of all, that there's no hurry in building him a temple. It's a nice idea, but if God really needed or wanted a Temple, he'd ask for it. But the Lord isn't like other gods. He doesn't crave our worship or our temples, built by human hands.

And, actually, he's just fine with the Tabernacle, because it means his people always know that he is with them. Where they go, the Tabernacle goes. Where the Tabernacle is, there God is. This is a good thing for them to remember. And God wants to keep it this way for a little bit longer.

But God isn't angry with David for having this idea. Quite the contrary. God loves David. God strengthens David. God chose David specifically to be the King of Israel. He took David straight from the pasture, from tending his father Jesse's sheep, and made him prince over his people.

And then God makes a promise to David. And it's easy to overlook the significance of this promise. Because, at first glance, it looks pretty straightforward: Your son will inherit your throne and he will build a house for my name. He's talking about Solomon. Simple... but not really.

Because, while Solomon does have some of these characteristics, there are other aspects of this promise that Solomon doesn't come close to fulfilling. *"I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever... your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."*

And he shall reign forever and ever. This isn't just about Solomon. About one generation of David's family who would come and go. And whose own son, Rehoboam, would be responsible for all but destroying Israel in civil war.

No, this is a prophecy about Jesus. Jesus, whose own body was the true house for God's name. Jesus, who is the only begotten Son of the Father. Jesus, who committed no iniquity, yet who was disciplined for our sake with the rod of men and with the stripes of the sons of men. Jesus from whom God's steadfast love never departed, such that he was raised on the third day. Jesus, who shall reign forever and ever.

Jesus is the Son of David whom God promised. And the nativity story is quick to make that connection for us. Luke tells us all the back in verse 4 that Joseph is from Bethlehem, the city of David, because he is from the house and lineage of David. The angel repeats that connection in his message to the shepherds, telling them, *“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*

The Son of David whom you have been awaiting is now born in exactly the place he should be: in Bethlehem, the city of David. And he is not just a king. He is a Savior. He is the Christ. He is the Lord.

And yet, he didn't look like any of those things. He certainly didn't look like a king. Solomon was born in absolute wealth and luxury. He spent his life surrounded by gold and expensive clothing and the finest food. And... well... women. Way too many women.

But Jesus? Jesus was born in a barn. He was wrapped in rags and laid in a feeding trough. The only people who came to worship him were shepherds and gentiles. Just about the two lowest rungs of Jewish society.

Jesus didn't look like a king. Nor did he look like a Savior. This helpless little child? What could he do? He can't even change his own diaper. How can he possibly save us from anything?

He didn't look like a king. He didn't look like a Savior. And, quite frankly, he didn't look like the Lord. Not as a baby in a manger. Not as the son of a poor Jewish workman and his wife.

And maybe most of all, not as a man dying on a cross. Dying a criminal's death for crimes he didn't commit. On Palm Sunday morning, the crowds praised Jesus, crying out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” But just a few days later, he looked nothing like the Son of David. He looked nothing like that prophecy Nathan delivered. *“Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”* How can his throne be eternal if it ends in death?

And yet, in dying on the cross, that's exactly what Jesus was doing. He was making his throne eternal. For in his death, he destroyed death. And in his rising he has restored to us everlasting life.

In the very least kingly thing he could do, he established the throne of David forever. In enduring the rod of men and the stripes of the sons of men, he showed that God's steadfast love has not departed from us.

For we are the kingdom of God. We are the people he has taken for his possession. And the birth of the Son of David in the City of David is not just a historical footnote. It is not just a curious side-note in the biography of Jesus.

It is proof that God's kingdom is not temporary, like King Saul's was. It is not a kingdom built on human strength and power, or on sinful flesh and blood. It is not a kingdom from which God will ever depart.

No, it is an everlasting kingdom. A kingdom built on divine strength and power. Built on the sinless flesh and blood of Jesus Christ. For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. In him was a house for God's name.

And having come among us in the flesh, he will be with us always, to the very end of the age. For like the Tabernacle before him, where we are, there Christ is. Where Christ is, there God is. And where God is, there God's grace is, bringing salvation to all people.

Bringing salvation to us. Those who sit in darkness. Those who so often praise God only when he is bringing us wealth and luxury. Those who so often embrace ungodliness and worldly passion.

To you and to me, sinners who deserve the discipline and punishment of God, is born this day a savior, Christ the Lord. To you and to me, wandering sheep in God's pasture, is given a shepherd like David before him, Christ the Lord. To and to me, people without a home, is given an eternal kingdom, the kingdom of Christ the Lord.

And he shall reign forever and ever. Amen.