Sermon Notes

Speaker: Patrick Mead

12/22/24

The King Arrives, Advent part four. Matthew 1:18-23

1. We think of angels when we think of the birth of Jesus. We think of them singing and speaking to the shepherds. We think of them assuring Mary that was about to happen was from God and that she bore the Messiah within her womb. We often forget that an angel came to Joseph as well.

2. It is in his message to Joseph that we find out that Jesus is God, he is human, and that he is with us. That is rather spectacular news so let's not rush past Joseph.

3. I imagine Joseph was conflicted on many fronts. He was a righteous man and wanted to do what was right...but was unsure what was right. Most of us can relate. If he remained betrothed to Mary, there would be consequences. Rumors would never stop. It would affect his life, his friendships, his occupation. The angel assured Joseph that what was happening in Mary's womb came from God and not from any man.

4. That would cause another conflict, I would think. Joseph now will be Jesus's father in a secondary sense. God was his real father and that would play a major role in Jesus's life but also that of Joseph. In some sense, all of us who have children have really given birth or raised God's children. We only borrow them for 18 summers or so. It isn't my happiest thought but it is reality.

5. We went through a three week series in November called "Who Came Upon a Midnight Clear" so we won't belabor the point here, but the Jews were stunned at the very concept of God becoming a human being. They expected a Messiah, to be sure, but assumed it would be a man filled with the Spirit of God and sent to restore Israel to its glory days under David and Solomon. For God to actually come down and be a human with us, Immanuel, was a head spinning and worldview changing announcement.

6. After Bethlehem, there would be no doubt in the heavenlies that God was both personal and infinite. The Jews, by this time, had lost the pronunciation of the name of God, refused to spell it, for fear they would take it in vain. Now, to have God come to them as a person they can and will relate to, walk with, eat with...that was too much for most of them to grasp. Poor Joseph!

7. While others would wonder "who is this man who even forgives sins?" his father and mother would not be shocked. If God becomes a man, it is no surprise that He would forgive sins, walk on water, or even rise from the dead. The incarnation is the miracle that allows all the other miracles to take place. We do it no favors to rush by it with a few carols and then focus on theology and church rules.

8. Philippians 2 tells us that Jesus did not lay aside his deity when he came to earth; he laid aside his glory. Paul then tells us to have that same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus. We are not to be concerned with glory or status. Snobbery is not a Christian attribute.

9. In fact, just before Jesus's birth, Jospeh was told to lay aside his reputation to stay with Mary. Then, he was told that one of the rights all men had in his age would be taken from him. The angel told him what to name his son. Fathers had absolute rights to name their sons. It was a sign of the control the father had over and in his family. Remember that John the Baptist's father was also told what to name his son and, when he did, his family was confused and tried to push back: "This isn't one of our family names!" His father wrote on paper once again, "His name is John" (for he was mute at that time).

10. You might read this, shrug, and move on but hold back a moment. When God calls you, He knows you and He names you. If you say to God that you would be a Christian but if it means this, that, or another thing, then you won't be what you are really trying to do is name God. You are creating a puppet God who dances to the strings you put on him. Newsflash: that won't work.

11. If you want Jesus With You (Immanuel), you must do what he did; lay aside self-determination. Personally, I fought all my life until my 50s against being a pastor. Yes, I pastored and worked diligently for churches but I always thought of it as temporary, as something else I was doing. I was really a science guy, a teacher, something else. I fought the fact that God names me, names you. And then OSHC comes along and I could almost hear God say, "See? Why would you fight so hard when you were being made for this?"

12. It reminds me of Mordecai's question to Esther when the fate of the Jews rested on her young shoulders. "Who knows but you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

13. We look in the mirror and we don't like our face, our height, our body shape. We don't like our abilities; we want abilities that other people have. We want to be athletic like them, academic like them, beautiful like them, strong like them, good singers like them, etc. ad infinitum.

14. We do not realize that we are resisting the very fundamental fact that we have been named by God. You already are prepared and empowered to do everything He wants you to do. It may not be the task you wanted, but you are ready.

15. The visit of the wise men to the house where Jesus was living (perhaps as long as a year and a half later) supplies a question that we should ask ourselves as we navigate this world. They went to the authorities upon entering their land, as was required, and asked Herod, "where is the king?"

16. Where is the king? In your life, where is He? WHO is king in your life? I often remind us that political leaders are not our king but perhaps we should also admit that the king that runs our lives doesn't live in Washington, London, or Moscow. The king who runs our lives more often than not, lives in our mirror.

17. And THAT is the source of great evil. The Book of Joshua, one of the most blood-soaked books you will ever read, ends by saying "in those days, every one did what was right in their own eyes." Thus, tragedy.

18. The coming of Jesus was a threat to those who worshiped themselves, those who had power and privilege and wanted to keep it. Jesus knew they would fight for the throne of our lives as well as the throne in their own lives. He resorted to hyperbole to emphasize that there is room for only one king and he is that king. Luke 14:26.

19. Born that night in Bethlehem was our Savior, the Messiah, the Promised One. But that isn't the whole story. The one born that night is also our Lord, our God and our King. We tend to leave that part out. We sing that God is love, that is more true than we could ever imagine, but we also need to remember that God is a jealous God who will not tolerate our handing the throne of our life to another.

20. "THIS is my Son in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him!" He cried from heaven.

21. The good news is that we do not have a king who is like other kings. He is with us. He loves us. He pulls us toward the Father. The world would say he had the wrong family, the wrong credentials and was born in the wrong place. That is because they want a tame, predictable, obedient God. That is not Who came that night.

22. As the carol proclaims: Jesus, Lord at thy birth!

23. Let us sing the songs, declare the good news, and do a gut check as often as possible asking: who is on the throne of my life? Where is the king?

24. The good news is: he is here. With us.

Merry Christmas.