

11 December 2003
Advent Midweek 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Jesus: Descended from Kings”

Text: Matthew 1:6b-11 (1 Samuel 8:4-9; Philippians 2:4-10)

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

When we think of kings around the time of Christmas, we probably tend to think of kings like King Herod, or the “We Three Kings of Orient Are.” But tonight our attention is drawn to some *other* kings in the history of Israel, with names like Rehoboam, and Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah. For Jesus is not only descended from sinners, as we heard last week – this week we hear that He is also descended from kings.

But that fact is not as impressive as it sounds, for as we saw last week, these ancestors of Jesus, although kings, are quite a mixed bag. **Rehoboam**, the son of Solomon, was responsible for dividing the Kingdom of Israel into two kingdoms when he would not listen to the advice of his elders and instead of relaxing the burden that had been placed on the people, he actually chose to increase it. And because of that, 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel split away from Rehoboam, formed the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and made his brother Jeroboam their king instead. . . . In this list is also a king named **Manasseh**, who we are told was the *most wicked* king Judah ever had! . . . But then there are also some good kings listed – kings who tore down the idols and false worship centers the wicked kings had established, and returned the people to the worship of the true God. These were kings like **Asaph** and **Jehoshaphat**, **Hezekiah**, and **Josiah**, who found the long lost Book of the Torah in the Temple, had it read to the people again, and restored the faith of the nation.

But what these kings did or did not do is not why they are in the ancestry of Jesus. Rather, they show us once again how **God is faithful to His promises**, *even* when rejected by His people! For the very fact that Israel had earthly kings was a rejection of God as their King. This is what we heard in the first reading this evening from First Samuel. The people were clamoring for an earthly king, so they could be like all the nations around them, even though they were not like all the nations around them. God warned them what they were getting into, that it would not be like they thought, and that their kings would increase their hardship and tax them, and make their lives harder, but they insisted. And so finally God told Samuel, **“Obey the voice of the people . . . for they**

have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.” . . . You see, Israel had a King, the King of the Universe, the giver of all good gifts, the Almighty God – but they rejected Him. And God allowed it. He did not force His people to stay. But His words of warning came true – starting, as I said, with the increased burden imposed by Rehoboam, and then as we heard at the end of this section of the genealogy, ending with the conquering of the people, and their deportation to Babylon.

And more than once, the idolatry and wickedness of these kings caused God to want to destroy the nation, but He did not. For as we are told, ***“The Lord was not willing to destroy Judah, for the sake of David His servant, since He promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever.”*** (1 Kings 8:19) . . . God had made a promise to Abraham, that the real King, the Messiah, would come from his lineage. God repeated that promise to David, that the real King, the Messiah, would come from his lineage. And so even though there were times in the history of Israel when those promises seemed to be in jeopardy, God remained faithful. He kept His people. He endured the evil and the rejection. He did not allow them to be destroyed. For from these kings would come the King, would come His Son.

And this King, *unlike the others*, would be God’s King. Anointed and appointed by God, to serve God’s people and be God’s representative. He would be a King not out for His own gain, but to bring gain to His people. A King not causing His people to die in battle for Him, but who would die in battle on the cross for them. A King who would not mislead His people, but lead them to God in faithfulness, truthfulness, and righteousness. And so He was as we heard in the second reading from Philipians: the One, ***“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”***

And at Christmastime, we see this King who did not strive for greatness, but who lowered Himself and took the form of a servant. We see Him born in the likeness of men, in human form, lying in the manger. We see Him humble, not exalted; serving, not demanding. Feared by King Herod. Worshipped by Magi. The faithful, righteous, and truthful King whose Kingdom is not of this world. He has come to reclaim and rescue His people from our captivity to sin, and our lust to be like everyone else. And He makes us His own, not to be His royal subjects, but to be royalty, in the royal family, princes and princesses of the King. And through the forgiveness He earned for us through His death and resurrection, that is what we are!

And so there is a King in Israel – the new Israel – who is the Son of David and sits on the

throne of David in Heaven. The King descended from kings, was who was born for us and who died for us, and who ascended and still reigns for us. Sadly, many still reject Him, preferring earthly kings instead. But to those who by faith are in His Kingdom of grace, the Church, He is a King unlike any other. A faithful King. A merciful King. A King full of grace and blessing. A forgiving King. For He is the King of kings. And unlike the Israelite kingdom, which ended with the deportation to Babylon, He bids us to live in His Kingdom that will never end, when He takes us from His Kingdom of grace here, to His Kingdom of glory in Heaven.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Please rise for prayer.