

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on November 30, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb on Luke 1:26-38.

Series: A Long Time Coming

Today's Focus: The King

"A Kingdom Worth Waiting For"

Anybody else notice how quickly Christmas came this year? Of course I know that it's still November, technically. But it sure feels like Christmas already, doesn't it? In fact no sooner were people lining up to get their pumpkin spice lattes at Starbucks in October when all of a sudden one day every drink there was being served in red snowflake Christmas cups while Christmas music was being played. That was on November 1st this year! Christmas it seems is coming earlier and earlier every year all around us. Not coincidentally Christmas ads and Christmas shopping and Christmas credit card debt comes earlier and earlier every year too.

Well today as we start this new series *A Long Time Coming* we're going to break away from all this and step back to a time when people had to wait much longer than 10 months for Christmas to keep coming around. They had to wait centuries. Millennia. And why? Because they were waiting for something bigger than black Friday discounts at their favorite stores, something bigger even than opening up the pile of presents underneath the tree. They were waiting for the gift of Christ himself.

"He's coming." That was message of the prophets—one after another. The prophets were men sent by God to announce that despite the rebellion of sinful human beings against God, God was going to reach out and send our world the gift of a Savior. This is by and large the message of the Old Testament in the Bible. "He's coming." The prophets who announced this good news described this coming Savior in various ways. He would be a king. He would be a priest. He would be a prophet. He would be all these things all at once. And he would fulfill these roles perfectly where as previously every one of these roles had been filled by imperfect people many of whom were gigantic moral failures not unlike ourselves sometimes.

If you've ever read parts of the Old Testament maybe you've probably been shocked at how much sin is frankly described. There is drunkenness, adultery, and divorce. There is greed, lying, conspiracy, and murder. There is suicide, idolatry, witchcraft, and fraud. Name a sin, it's there. In some ways the Old Testament tells the story of one person after another screwing up big time—even when it came to the people who were supposed to mirror God to the world—like the prophets, the priests, and the kings. Yet God kept sending prophets to proclaim, "He's coming." God was not going to give up on his people. Friends, God has not given up on you or me either.

So imagine a time, when life was a little simpler. Imagine a time when much of the world remained a mystery. When there was no such thing as electricity. No such thing as shopping malls, text messages, or cell phones. When there was no television. No Facebook. No internet. No credit cards. No cars. A time of unfulfilled prophecy. A time of waiting. A long time waiting. Then into this world a messenger from heaven bursts onto the scene. An angel! He comes having just been in the very presence of God. His name is Gabriel. And here's what we read in Luke 1:26-38...

²⁶ *In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee,*
²⁷ *to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name*
was Mary. ²⁸ *The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with*
you."

²⁹ *Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be.* ³⁰ *But the*
angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ *You will conceive and give*
birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most*
High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ *and he will reign over Jacob's*
descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

So the angel Gabriel says, "Mary, you're going to give birth to a king. Someone who will sit on David's throne. Someone who will reign over Jacob's descendants forever. Someone whose kingdom will never end."

Now friends, what do you think about that? Well we of course don't live in a country today where we pay homage to a king so maybe these thoughts are a bit hard for us to relate to. But the idea of having a king was familiar to the Jewish people who lived in Mary's day. Though under Roman rule at the time, having a king was a long part of Israel's history. Having a king was sort of their idea in the first place and it didn't really work out the way they had planned. The people sort of got what they asked for.

You see God was supposed to be their only king but that wasn't good enough for them because they couldn't see God, not with their own physical eyes. It was a little hard therefore for them to follow an invisible king. You see these aren't just modern challenges. They wanted a king they could see. Someone they could follow. Someone they could trust in to protect and deliver them. So the descendants of Jacob told Samuel the prophet, "We want a king" and here's their reason why: "*Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles*" (1 Samuel 8:20).

Why'd they want a king? *To be like all the other nations.* Now does that sound to you like God pleasing motivation? God, I don't really want what you want for me so much. I just want what the rest of the world has. God, it's kind of hard to just wait around for you to give me what you think is best. I'd like to get what I think is best. And God, what I really want is to have what all those other people have. Then I'll be happy. God, I want this new car so that my standard of living can look like all the other people in my neighborhood. God, I want this new gadget because everybody else has got one. God, I want these new shoes so I can be cool like everybody else.

I want what they've got. I want to experience what they experience. And here's the deal, God. I'd like to get it without having to change a thing about me. I'd like to get it without you or some pastor telling me to think differently about anything. I'd like to get it without you or anybody else telling me to act differently than the world around me. I'd like to just blend it with culture so that no one might inconvenience me by noticing that there's something different about the way I approach life.

Friends, who or what is sitting on the throne of your life? Who or what is your king? Is it God, or is it something else? Because if it's not God then whatever it is has become your idol. And the thing with every idol is that they're temporary and they'll always let you down in the end. Like an expert marketer the devil always over-promises and under-delivers of what his idols can give. But when God himself makes a promise, he never under-delivers. God never over-promises and under-delivers!

³⁴ *"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

³⁵ *The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."*

³⁸ *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.*

At first Mary was troubled at the angel's words, "Greetings, you who are highly favored!" And why wouldn't she be? She wasn't highly favored by anybody except maybe by her fiance. She was just this young unwed Jewish peasant girl from a nowhere kind of place called Nazareth. But then the angel assured her: *"Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God."*

Friends, do you know what that word "favor" means? It's the same word in the Bible as "grace." Mary, don't be afraid. You have found *grace* with God. The angel doesn't say, "Mary, God has taken notice of you because you're so special and so full of grace" or something like that. No, he says, "You have found grace." And grace by definition is God's undeserved love. It's God love for us, not our love for God. It's God's gift to us, not our promises to God. "Mary, you have found grace. God is giving you an undeserved gift. This gift is that you will be the mother of the Son of God himself. The gift that makes Christmas truly worth celebrating is Christ the King...and his kingdom will never end."

A couple weeks ago I was filling up my car with gas at the Speedway station on 76th and Grange by Southridge. On a Monday morning it was a busy place. And as I was pumping gas I noticed there was a van parked along the curb. Inside there was a woman. She was scanning the people pumping gas. Then I noticed her bow her head as if in prayer. And then she came out of her van and walked straight toward me. My guess is she had me pegged as the unbeliever in the crowd. I think perhaps she'd prayed that God would guide her to the one person he wanted her to talk her. I could see from the Watchtower magazine in her hand that she was a Jehoavah's Witness. And so I said a quick on-the-fly prayer myself as I realized she was coming straight towards me. We exchanged Good Morning greetings and then she asked, "Have you ever heard of the Lord's prayer?"

I said, "Ah yes that one's one of my favorites actually." Then she said, "Don't you think that when Jesus told us to pray 'Your kingdom come' ...what he meant is an earthly, political kind of kingdom?" And I said, "No I don't think that at all. I do believe that Jesus is my king but he went to great lengths during his life to correct that misunderstanding about an earthly sort of kingdom. Pontius Pilate asked Jesus

point blank, “Are you a king then?” And Jesus told him, “My kingdom is not of this world.” And once when his disciples asked him, “When’s the kingdom going to come?” Jesus told them, “*The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you*” (Luke 17:20-21).

So no, I don’t believe that Jesus will be some earthly, political king. But I do believe that the place where he now rules is in my heart. His kingdom is within me. It’s wherever I go. It’s wherever I gather with other believers who have it in their hearts too by faith. You see where there used to be fear, my king Jesus gives me peace. Where there used to be sadness, he gives me joy. Where there used to be guilt, he gives me forgiveness. And most importantly he gives me the sure hope that one day I will be with him in his heavenly kingdom because Jesus himself is true God and true man. So when he lived perfectly according to God’s commands he did that as my substitute. When he died on the cross he took away all my sins and the sins of the whole world. When he rose from the dead he won the victory over the devil and he promises me that one day I will be with him in his heavenly kingdom all because of his free grace.”

As you can imagine this wasn’t quite the answer the woman expected but she said, “Thank you. I’ve never heard it said like that before.” Then she walked back to her van and drove off. I prayed that God would use my words to help her know Jesus as her true king who rules in her heart who can give her a peace that never ends. That’s why Jesus came. That’s what makes the gospel message so precious. That’s what makes Christmas worth celebrating every year because it’s about a kingdom worth waiting for. It’s a kingdom that can’t be bought in a store. It’s kingdom that we can have right now by faith and experience fully one day in heaven just as Jesus once told the dying thief on the cross who said to him, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom” and Jesus replied, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43).

For the last couple weeks the hard drive on my laptop has been failing. I know because Windows has been warning me every 15 minutes or so. So because I’m a prudent man I made sure I had all my files backed up and everything new that I was working on like this morning’s sermon I saved it to a flash drive instead in case the hard drive were to fail as I’m working on my sermon. However when I went to finish working on this sermon yesterday I discovered that my flash drive had actually failed. All my work from this past week was lost. I was so frustrated. I thought I was being wise and technology once again proved me a fool. And I was reminded how so much in this world is futile. So much is frustration. So much is stress. So much is pressure. So much is pain. And there is precious little peace. It’s clear that we’re not in Paradise yet.

But everything changes when Christ rule in our hearts as our King. So this Christmas season we once again have the opportunity to simply follow the cultural norms of buying, over-spending, busyness, and stress. Or we can take the opportunity to declare a Kingdom that’s truly worth waiting for. A kingdom that can't be bought in a store – believing that Jesus changed everything when God gave us the gift of His Son. When Jesus rules in our hearts then it changes the way we give gifts, it changes the way we love the world around us, and the way we worship the King all the year long. Amen.

My Next Steps

Tension: Sometimes we wait a long time for God to come to our rescue. And then when he does, we're not really ready for the way he chooses to rescue us.

Connect: God had promised a Savior through the offspring of the woman. Mary, like so many through the centuries, was eagerly waiting for the fulfillment of that promise. What were her thoughts when she found out that her child would be the long promised king? God gave her faith to humbly accept the role he had chosen for her.

Treasure to Share: *"For no word from God will ever fail"* (Luke 1:37).

Challenge: Christmas is coming. Once again, we have the opportunity to simply follow the cultural norms of buying, over-spending and busyness. Or we take the opportunity to declare a Kingdom that can't be bought in a store – believing that Jesus changed everything when God gave us the gift of His Son. When we trust that Kingdom – it changes the way we give gifts, the way we love the world around us, and the way we worship the King. (Check out www.adventconspiracy.org)