

12.25.08 Christmas Day  
Christ as King and Prince of Peace  
Luke 2:1-20

How much vies for our attention today that keeps us from centering on Jesus. Luke wrote his gospel to try to tell people who had never heard the story of Jesus about this great story, and to tell others who knew it partially, much more.

Luke begins his Gospel simply, with measured if fervent explanation. Chapter 1, v. 1: “In as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed.

But Luke’s overall goal is to help the whole world center on the story of Jesus Christ: Like a composer creating a symphony, Luke the composer begins simply, and builds the work, adding instrument and instrument, phrase after phrase, so that by chapter 2, Luke creates a mighty grand overture to the king of the universe, Jesus Christ.

Whether each statement is completely historical is not the question so much as from Luke’s perspective to state the deep truth: that the baby born in Bethlehem is the king of heaven and earth.

Luke pressed many insights into his description of Jesus’ birth, condensed from a century of people’s love for and reflections out of their resurrection faith in Jesus. He situates Jesus birth during a time when the entire world is taxed under the famous emperor Augustus. He thus gives a preparatory drum roll to suggest that ‘the real bearer of peace and salvation to the whole world is not the Roman emperor Augustus, but the one whose birth occurred in Bethlehem and whose birth was announced by angels to lowly shepherds, Jesus.

So many allusions and references to scripture and tradition—Luke brings all these into this symphony of praise to the king, the prince of peace, born in such a humble, simple setting.

The angels with the heavenly hosts praise God (and wouldn’t we love to hear that choir: “glory in highest heaven to God; and on earth peace for people whom he favors.”) They sing of Jesus, the true Prince of Peace; a prince who does not come with a political or military mandate but is ruler of an eternal kingdom, begun here on earth and extending to eternal life: a kingdom of peace by no less than God’s providence.

And, this prince of Peace is yet human, born as Luke relates into the lineage of David. David, the shepherd who became king of Israel, who sustained God’s people. And, like David Jesus is born in Bethlehem, the home of David and place of his anointing.

Jesus is wrapped in cloth bands, Luke tells us, perhaps alluding to another king, King Solomon once described his birth as “cared for with cloth bands and concern, no king ever had another beginning of existence.” (Wisd. 7:4-5).

Jesus is Lord, Luke announces, with many links to past kings; yet in Jesus God is doing a new thing. .

God is bringing a new king, whose kingdom will bring “peace in heaven and glory in the highest heaven” (Luke 19:38). God is bringing a new kind of kingdom.

Jesus’ first words were (according to Mark 1:15): “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.”

And we who are followers of the king are continually, every day of our lives, invited to live in this kingdom.

Again, what is this kingdom? What do we experience and look for in Jesus’ kingdom?

Jesus’ kingdom is one of peace, which is based in the Hebrew sense of shalom, to be whole, complete. “This is not merely an absence of war, but a state of bounty or well-being that comes from God and includes concord, harmony, order, security, and prosperity. ( Anchor Bible, Fitzmeyer, p. 225). So important is peace that Luke summarizes Jesus’ message as peace, in Acts 10:36: “the word which he sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (he is the Lord of all!). “

Jesus reign in Luke also brings salvation “a rescue from sin, the state of alienation from God,” a turning outward from being turned inward, the state of sin as Luther describes Jesus, the king, cancels all the debt, all the discord in humans’ relation to God.

And, Jesus brings life, like eternal life, a life that transcends the ordinary human life.

And, Jesus invites to his kingdom all people, absolutely without exception, ; all whether rich or poor, male or female, the people on the boundaries, especially the *anawim* meaning “the little ones,” (people without power, who especially concern Luke).

This is the Kingdom into which our king invites us.

In this kingdom we are not bound but are to learn to be free. Because the the spirit of this prince of peace holds us and the world; cares for even the sparrow that falls; is free, like the wind, and perfectly loving, making a home for all, bringing all home

Each of us is bound at times or moments in our lives to life outside the kingdom, outside of our home—frightened, anxious, withholding love that could bring life to another, judgmental; yet we have moments of discerning a freedom that is connected to a deep joy, a peace, a sense of coming home.

It is a matter of giving ourselves over, abandoning ourselves, to this Jesus, the Prince of Peace, in whom God lives fully. Unfortunately so many think of the demanding, rule-abiding God that some people follow; nor is this God a being to whom we give allegiance without being able to think about it or use our reason.

Rather, we trust from Luke and the other Gospels writers, who told the story as they knew it: that Jesus, the prince of Peace, was and is compassionate toward human frailty; asking people to be perfect, in trying to follow the Way, but himself given to leniency, a person who in his lordship yet was joyous and celebratory and a perfectionist; wanting people to be perfect as God is perfect, that is, to be merciful. He asked a few to give up all they had; to the others he brought a message of comfort and joy.

It is to this Jesus, Lord of earth and heaven, to whom on this Christmas Day we are asked once again to commit our lives.

*As the Gradual from a 1620 Lutheran Mass on Christmas morning, sings in unbroken tradition from the Gospel of Luke:*

*From heaven on high I come hither,/bringing you good news;/so much good news do I bring/that of it I will sing and speak.  
Today a little child is born to you/by a chosen virgin/a child so tender and fine/who shall be your joy and delight./*

*He is the Lord Christ, our God,/who will lead you out of all distress;/he will be your savior himself,/cleansing you from all sin.  
He brings to you all the bliss/that God the Father has prepared,/so that you shall live with us/in the kingdom of heaven now and for evermore.*

*So mark now the sign aright,/the crib, the wretched swaddling clothes;/there you will find the child lying/who will preserve and sustain the world.*

*Then let us all be joyful/and go in with the shepherds/to see what God has granted us, presented us with his dearest son.*

*Ah, my dear little Jesus,  
make yourself a clean soft cot/to rest in my heart's shrine,/that I may never forget you.  
Thereby let me be joyful at all times,/ever free to leap and sing/the sweet notes of apt lullabies/with heartfelt joy.*

*Praise and glory be to God on his highest throne/who bestows on us his only son,/at which the host of angels rejoices/and sings to us such a new year.*

Amen.