

God had once promised David that a son from his own body would sit on his throne forever. And he said that he would establish his kingdom. This king to come would be a true king, one who feared God and always did what was right. God would bless him as he had blessed David, and more besides. He would be everything that a king should be. He would be the true king of God's people.

But unfortunately, the kings that all came after David were less than ideal. If you ever read 1 and 2 Kings, or even 1 and 2 Chronicles, you will find some good kings among them. Some who genuinely tried to do what God wanted them to do. But unfortunately they were the exception rather than the rule. So many of them were not good. And even the good ones, even the ones that tried to follow God, were less than perfect. And the further along you went in the line of David, the worse it got. The line of David was proving to be quite the disappointment.

And by the time we get to the prophet Isaiah, things are almost at their very worst. And King Ahaz, who was one of the kings that lived during the time of Isaiah, was among the very worst of all. In fact, he is described in this way in 2 Kings chapter 16: "He walked in the way of the kings of Israel. He even burned his son as an offering, according to the despicable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. And he sacrificed and made offerings on the high places and on the hills and under every green tree." This was supposed to be a son of David, one who was following in his steps. This was supposed to be the king of God's people. And yet he was showing his true colors. The house of David was turning away from the Lord.

But God did not give up on Ahaz, even though he could have. He gave to him another chance to trust him. He told Ahaz that the invasion that he was so afraid of would be taken away. The armies would come to nothing. And all that Ahaz needed to do was trust the Lord. Just believe in him, and it would all go away. But Ahaz was not even willing to do that. He turned away from God.

And so God said that the house of David would be cut off, cut down like a tree. Their sin had brought this judgment down upon them, and the line of kings would now be broken. There would no longer be a king in Jerusalem. And in fact, as God says in Jeremiah chapter 18: "If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it." And so it was here. The house of David had stopped listening to the Lord, and so God was going to bring it to an end.

But what about that promise that God had made to David? What was going to happen to that? It's not like God could just forget it and just say that he wasn't going to do it anymore, because that would mean that he had lied to David. And if we can't trust what God says, then how can he truly be God? But God did not lie to David. The promise would be fulfilled. A son would sit upon his throne, and he would be a true king, everything that the kings of Israel should've been.

That's what Isaiah is looking towards in our reading from Isaiah chapter 11. He is showing us a picture of this king who was to come. Isaiah says in verse 1: "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit." The house of David may only be a stump at this point, but it was not completely dead. It would send forth a new shoot,

like a tree stump that continues to grow even after it is been cut down because the roots are still alive. A king would come from a line which seem to be long dead.

And he would not seem to be like a king, because he wouldn't have riches. He wouldn't have pomp. He wouldn't have grandeur. He would instead be a poor man. But he would have what the true kings of God always had. He would be anointed with the Spirit of the Lord. Just like the kings of old who did mighty things through God, so also this king would come and in the power of God do what God wanted him to do.

And he would not be like other kings, especially not like Ahaz. Instead of injustice and corruption, this king would bring true justice to his people. Instead of serving the rich, he would also do what was right for the poor. Instead of doing what was evil, he would seek after God. He would put on righteousness like a belt. It would be like his daily wear. Everything that he said and everything that he did would truly be godly. He would be a good and a righteous king, one who was everything that the kings after David should've been.

And this king would bring a peace unlike any other. Isaiah describes it as if it is a completely transformed world, as if the creation itself changes at the coming of this king. Wolves and lambs shall run together in the same flock without fear or danger. Calves and lions would become friends. And a toddler would be able to lead them, because they would be so tame. A lion shall eat straw like the ox instead of flesh, and a child would be able to play over the den of a snake without fear. It would be a world transformed, where peace would rule over everything, where war would be forgotten, and where the nations would be gathered together into one. As Isaiah says in verse 9: "They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." All the world would know God, and knowing God, they would walk in his ways, the ways which make for peace.

And this king would indeed be the fulfillment of the promise. And it is the birth of this king that we celebrate tonight. Because Jesus is that king. His rule is peace and freedom, and his kingdom will never come to an end. Jesus comes to do what is right in all things. He does not serve the rich at the expense of the poor. He does not take bribes and pervert justice. He does not serve himself at the expense of his people. He walks in the ways of righteousness, doing everything that is right. And in him we find true unity. In him we find our true king. A signal, a banner calling together the nations, because he is a king unlike any other.

But the world still seems full of violence, we say. It is a world that is still at war, a world full of bloodshed, a world where wolves continue to devour lambs, where snakes and adders are just as dangerous as they've ever been. And there's so many who don't know the Lord. All of that may lead us to ask: "Well, is Jesus really the fulfillment? Did Jesus really bring these things to pass if it seems like so much is not yet true?"

But yes, he is the fulfillment. He is the promised son of David, but the promise to David is not yet fully complete. Because Jesus reigns as king, but his reign grows with each passing day. And Isaiah looks forward in this passage to the day when it will finally be complete, on the Last Day when the kingdom of God will come in fully. On that day there will be no more war. On that day there will be no more evil. On that day there will be only peace. Bloodshed will come to an end.

Nations will be united in him. And all will kneel before him and call him Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So it is good for us to celebrate the birth of Jesus on this Christmas Eve, even as we live in a world still at war, because Jesus comes to bring life and truth. And the peace that we so often look for at Christmas time will be ours in him forever. Because this Christmas spirit that we feel right now? Unfortunately, it will come to an end. But we will find a true Christmas joy when we see Jesus face to face on the Last Day. And that is something worth holding on to, something worth celebrating as we remember the coming of our king.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, who has been born as the King of Kings and as the Prince of Peace, bring us the joy that comes only from you as we wait for your coming, so that we may know your peace, both now and in eternity; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.