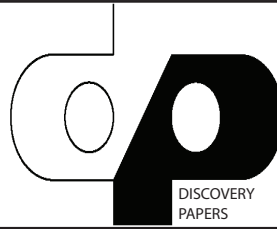


THE KING IS COMING

CHRISTMAS



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Various Passages
Christmas Message
Paul Taylor
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Various Passages

Why are we so uncomfortable with silence? What are we afraid of? What does silence stir within us? Insecurity or doubt or anxiety? What fears does it stir up? What insecurity or doubt or anxiety?

For four hundred years before Jesus was born, the prophets of God were silent. His people became anxious. They wondered why God didn't speak to them. They asked whether he had forgotten them. They asked whether he was still there. They couldn't understand his silence.

Why doesn't God speak?

Why does everyone else talk so much?

Here are the headlines from CNN.com a few days ago.

"Obama: 'We will destroy ISIS'

"Trump on Obama: 'Is that all?'"

"U.S. Unveiling terror alert system"

"Beijing issues 1st smog red alert"

"Reality TV star's brother missing"

"Super Bowl halftime act revealed"

"Instagram's most liked photos of 2015"

"Look at me! Selfies of the year"

"Shaw: 'I spent \$1M in 45 minutes'"

"Try our 'Star Wars' Jedi Apprentice quiz"

"Has black leadership failed Baltimore?"

"This time, no charges in Chicago"

"Rare deep-sea squid caught on camera"

Video about Walmart trip goes viral. Pizza delivery guy shocked by huge tip"

"Things you didn't know your tongue can do"

"Major power shift in Venezuela"

"Dogs will outlive us all"

What's worse: the endless chatter of noise that fills our world or the vacuum of God's silence?

Why doesn't God speak? Why does everyone else talk so much?

This morning at Peninsula Bible Church we are considering the Christmas story. During this season, we remember the birth of a baby boy who would change the world. We tell the story of a young woman who became pregnant through the miraculous work of God's spirit. We tell about her husband, who chose to trust that God was at work rather than believe the rumors of adultery. We tell about a crowded city and an uncomfortable birth and some excited shepherds and awe-filled magi.

But the story we remember at Christmas is part of a much larger story. If you've been worshipping with us regularly at PBC, you have been hearing part of that bigger story. For the past four months, we've been immersed in the longest narrative of the Old Testament: the story of David.

This morning, we're going to try to understand how the Christmas story connects with the David story and what all of those things have to do with our own stories. We're going to step back even further to do that, and see how both the David story and the Christmas story are part of the larger story that God tells in the Bible.

My hope this morning is to help us hear a promise that runs throughout that larger story. It begins at creation and beats like a drum for centuries. That promise is fulfilled in part when David sits on the throne of Israel. That same promise is what gives such great meaning to the birth of Jesus in Nazareth. And that promise is what sustains us in our world today.

To hear the promise, we have to listen closely to the words of Scripture. We have to discern it quietly behind the silence. We have to pick out the promise despite the noise. But I'm confident that we will hear this steady drumbeat of a simple message that brings peace, joy, and hope to the world. It's the message of Christmas. It's the message of the Gospel. It's a message that our world desperately needs to hear.

The Old Testament Promise

The Old Testament opens with emptiness. But that emptiness is quickly filled by a God who "created the

heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1) to replace the formless and void darkness that was over the face of the deep.

The story of creation that is told in the first few chapters of Genesis includes many elements that would be familiar to the Israelites at the time when it was written. Themes from Egyptian and Canaanite cultures would remind readers of the magnificent palaces and throne rooms of ancient kings.

The idea is expressed well in **Isaiah 66:1**:

**Thus says the Lord:
“Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house that you would build for me,
and what is the place of my rest?”**

Here’s the point: what God created when he created all that we see is, in reality, the magnificent throne room of a royal palace. All of creation is a palace. It is built for a king. But who is that king?

With each step of the ensuring biblical story, we wonder about who will sit on that throne and rule over the kingdom of earth. We know that thrones don’t stay empty for long, so we’re confident that a king is coming.

As time went on, God formed a people in the nation of Israel. He gave them a Law to live by and leaders to govern them, but things didn’t work well. Something was missing. Throughout the book of judges, we hear the longing refrain expressed in **Judges 17:6**, **“In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”**

God’s people need a king to sit on that throne. With each failure of a leader in the book of Judges, our anticipation grows. God didn’t create his people to see them destroy each other and the world around them. We are confident that he will give them a leader. We hold out hope that a king is coming.

Finally, the nation is given a king. We are disappointed that Israel’s first king was an insecure, paranoid, power-hungry failure. But then comes David. He is not a perfect king. We’ve already seen that in part. We’ll see even more of it as we continue in his story. But there is something about him...

2 Samuel 5:12 describes his reign:

And David knew that the Lord had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

The empty throne room, the leaderless people, the world longing for a picture of justice and peace.... The quiet drumbeat promising that the king is coming. It would seem to have been answered in David. The nation was at peace. The nation was prosperous. The king wasn’t coming. The king had come.

David was a great king. But then in **1 Kings 2:10**, **“David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David.”**

David did what even the best of kings do. David died.

What would come of the nation now? What would come of God’s creation? The next king David’s son Solomon, was wise and rich, but he squandered both of those gifts. The next king split the people against each other into a bitter rivalry that would last a thousand years. Successive kings ignored God, oppressed the people, and ravaged the land until enemies defeated and conquered the nation of God and exiled her people to foreign lands.

While things were getting worse, God gave his people individuals to speak on his behalf. These prophets began to speak of another king. The drumbeat was back.

Zechariah 9:9:

**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

In the midst of the chaos, God’s people could expect a king who would bring righteous. This king would save them.

Jeremiah 23:5:

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

This new ruler will come in the line of David. He will bring in the kind of glory days that David created. He will be a good king

Micah 5:2:

**But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans
of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,**

**whose coming forth is from of old,
from ancient days.**

Bethlehem will be the birth place of this new king. And he will be the king, the one who has been spoken of since ancient times. David was great, but he died and the world needs a new king. That king is coming. When he comes, everything will get better.

Do you know this feeling?

Most of us know about waiting for someone to come. We know about waiting for the job or the girl or the guy or the baby or the raise or the house or the UPS delivery guy. We know this drumbeat. We know about the promise that something will come and make everything better.

As a kid, Christmas, above all things, was a season of waiting. Twenty five doors on the Advent calendar. It seemed like a whole week waiting for the next day to open a new one. Wondering which presents under the tree would have my name on them. Anxiously knowing that December 25 would be the day where things would get better.

What are you waiting for? What is going to make your life better?

We all feel the empty throne. We see that something is missing in our lives. We have this innate sense that the world isn't working like it could. Things ought to be better. Unarmed teens shouldn't be killed because of the color of their skin. Children shouldn't die crossing the sea to escape an oppressive regime. Waking up in the morning and facing my day shouldn't be as hard as it is.

We're all waiting for something, and none of us likes to wait. What about your life needs to be fixed? Where is the empty throne and the broken heart?

Do you know that you were born to be part of a kingdom? Do you know that you aren't the only one waiting for things to get better? Do you know how eagerly the whole earth has been waiting for her king? Can you hear the drumbeat throughout the pages of the Old Testament? Do you hear it over the silence? Can you discern it behind the noise? The king is coming.

The Birth of a King

For many, many years, the drumbeat of that prophecy carried God's people. Through exile and rebuilding and rebellion and drought and famine and failure and success, God's people waited.

Today we celebrate not the waiting, but the arrival. Today and every year when we celebrate Christmas, we remember that the king has come.

One thousand years after David's death, an angel appeared to a young woman to tell her that someone was coming to sit on his throne:

Luke 1:31-33:

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

This woman was going to give birth to the king. She couldn't believe it. The miracle wasn't just that she was pregnant without having slept with a man. The miracle was that the one who was foretold for so many years was actually going to come. A king would come to sit on the throne of David and his kingdom would last forever.

So much was wrong with the world in which this young woman lived: the abuse by Roman soldiers; the hypocrisy of religious leaders; the burden of oppressive taxes; poverty and hopelessness. But, if her baby was going to be the king, then things were going to get better.

Mary and Joseph were poor. They had traveled to the distant village of Bethlehem for Joseph to register at the census in the hometown of his very distant ancestor, David. Mary and Joseph didn't know anyone. They couldn't find a place to stay. While they were there, the baby came. Sleeping in a barn with straw for their bed, this baby who was to be king came into the world.

There was no one to visit them. No one to celebrate their child until a strange group of men arrived. The angel had told a group of shepherds about this baby boy.

Luke 2:10-12:

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

When a child is born today, at Stanford or El Camino hospital or Kaiser's nice facility in Santa Clara, the parents take pictures. They post the news on Facebook. They email their parents and text their friends.

as part of an earthly dynasty. He was to be a different kind of king. They worshipped this king and they brought news of him all throughout the world.

Once things settle down, they will often send a birth announcement; a beautiful picture of the newborn child with fancy script and relevant statistics so that friends and family can celebrate with them.

This didn't happen in the ancient world. Births were not announced with fancy proclamations. So many women died during childbirth that pregnancy was feared and a healthy birth was a relief. Women were just happy to still be alive. No one sent letters to distant cities with news of their child.

However, there is one notable exception. There was one kind of birth that received an announcement. One kind of birth was proclaimed with great fanfare and public announcements sent far and wide: the birth of a king.

Read how the birth of Augustus Ceasar was referred to in a document nine years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

"...the birthday of the god [Augustus] has been for the whole world the beginning of good news (euangelion) concerning him."¹

When a king was born, news was sent throughout the kingdom. It was "good news"—the same word translated as "gospel" in the New Testament. The birth of a king was the gospel for his people.

This is why Persian nobleman came from far away to celebrate this event. **Matthew 2:2** records their arrival.

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

This is a great example of how the work of God is clear for those who are looking to see it. From a thousand miles away, these astrologers perceived that something great was happening in Bethlehem. They came to honor a new king. Kings in ancient times were worshipped as gods. These men came to show respect and honor at this king.

The wise men had no idea that they would find a baby born to a poor immigrant family. They probably expected to be led to a palace. But this king wasn't born

Yesterday we had the chance to drive around our area, stopping at the homes of some elderly members of our community to sing Christmas carols for them. As we sung, "Hark the herald angels song, glory to the newborn king,"² it struck me that we were doing exactly what would have been done for the birth of a king in ancient times. We travelled throughout the area, proclaiming the good news of a king who was born.

Do you know that the king has been born? Do you know how significant it is for all of creation that this baby was born in Bethlehem so long ago?

What are you waiting for? Are you waiting for a king?

Who waits for a new king? The rich and powerful? No, they're doing fine. It's the helpless and the hopeless who wait for a new king; the overwhelmed and oppressed; the deprived and doubting and needy and fragile and excluded; the widow and the orphan and the refugee and the immigrant and the outsider; the ones who can't make life work. For them, a new king is good news.

This is us. This is all of us. When we're honest, anyway. A lot of us think that we have our life together. A lot of us are doing okay with the kings of this world. Or we think we are. But when we are honest with ourselves, we admit that we need a new kind of a king.

That's why we celebrate Christmas. The king that was foretold for so long has been born. But look around. Things aren't perfect. If the king was born, then what happened?

David came and ruled and died. Then the son of David came: Jesus came. He never ruled. And he died. Jesus died. Just like every other king that came before. And for three days, the silence returned.

But then this king did what no king has ever done before him. He rose from the dead. His death became life. He didn't defeat the mortal enemies of Rome or Egypt or Persia. He defeated death itself. Indeed, this was a new kind of a king.

For several weeks, it looked as if this king might be ready to usher in his kingdom. It looked as if everything was going to change. But then another surprise. This new king went away. He left for another land. Just as his kingdom was beginning to take form, he leaves.

Waiting for the Return

During Jesus' lifetime, he told a story about a king. Read how it begins.

Luke 19:11-12:

As they heard these things, he proceeded to tell a parable, because he was near to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately. 12 He said therefore, "A nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and then return.

This story continues about how the nobleman's servants used the gifts that he left them while he was gone. When Jesus himself left, I'm sure his followers thought back to this story. They realized, probably in hindsight, what Jesus was trying to prepare them for.

That's why the apostle Paul writes the following.

1 Timothy 6:13-15:

I charge you in the presence of God... 14 to keep the commandment unstained... until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ...15 who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords.

The new members of this kingdom realized that their king had left them behind. Not without the resources that they needed. And not forever. They knew their king was coming back. He had told them that before he left.

Then, one of their own received a vision. A beautiful and terrible vision of the king's return. He would come back and set things right once and for all. John saw the citizens of this new kingdom singing to their king upon his return.

Revelation 15:3b-4:

**"Great and amazing are your deeds,
O Lord God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways,
O King of the nations!
4 Who will not fear, O Lord,
and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed."**

Jesus' followers realized that this new kingdom was not just for Israel. Not just for Jews. This was a king for all nations. They thought Jesus immediately would bring in

a new kingdom for the Jews. But they grew to realize that Jesus left so that he could return and bring in a kingdom for all of creation. Any who believe were welcome.

And the drumbeat began again. The king is coming back.

A new group of people formed around this promise. They tried their best to put to good use the gifts that their king had left them. They wanted to see his kingdom take root so that they could properly celebrate his return.

Two weekends ago, we celebrated the stories of Christmas with a spectacular concert here at PBC. In between the music, our narrator spoke these words:

"The Creator of the universe entered the human story like sunlight piercing a deep cave. Jesus' birth brought hope to a dim and decaying world. He would grow with a wisdom able to satisfy thirsty souls. His compassion for sinners, and wanderers, and the poor in spirit would be contagious, and become an unstoppable force of peace that we call the church."

The church would become the kingdom of God, waiting for her king to return. The church would carry on the drumbeat of that promise. Sometimes this promise has pounded with enthusiasm. Sometimes it has barely been perceptible. But always, it has been there, reminding those who would listen, those who have ears that hear and hearts of faith: the king is coming back.

Can you hear it? Can you hear the drumbeat?

Sometimes we think that God is silent. We think that he might have spoken long ago but he doesn't speak today. No one gets healed. No one rises from the dead. Things today don't look like they were in the New Testament. The world is getting worse and God doesn't seem to be doing anything. Has God forgotten us? Is he even still here? Was he ever here in the first place?

Why doesn't God speak?

Other times we're just so overwhelmed by the noise of our world that we couldn't hear God if he were sitting right next to us. There is so much talking and promising, politicking, recruiting, criticizing, judging, despairing, weeping, and striving. We live in a constant stream of news stories, Facebook updates, funny videos, movies to attend, shows to binge on Netflix, emails and tweets and texts and occasionally, an actual phone call.

Why does everyone else talk so much?

It's so easy in our world to lose the drumbeat of this promise. We ignore it in the silence. We forget it in the noise.

But it is there. The king is coming. The king is coming back.

Every week when we gather for worship, we proclaim that promise. Every time we pray in the name of Jesus, we play a beat of that drum. When we study his Word, we play a beat of that drum. When we love our community, we play a beat of that drum. When we visit our sick and pray for recovery and ask for wisdom, we play a beat of that drum.

This is what we do. We have a part to play in preparing the world for her king. We use our gifts to build the kingdom so that when the king returns, we will celebrate in joy. Over the silence and the behind the noise, the church faithfully proclaims the drumbeat of this promise: the king is coming back. Can you hear it?

And every year, something special gets added to that rhythm. Because every December, we remember that our king came so many years ago in fulfillment of his first promise. And that gives us hope that he will return to fulfill his second promise.

Secular holidays look back. We honor our Veterans, as well we should. We remember declaring independence and the founding of this great country. We celebrate significant events in the past.

But the holidays of the church are different. Christmas is not only about remembering the day that our king was born in Bethlehem. During this season we remember with anticipation. We recall that our king was born as an encouragement that he is coming back. Looking back points us forward.

Christmas is a cymbal crash to the drumbeat of the promise. The birth of a baby foretells our king's return. Jesus was born. Jesus is coming back.

So when you talk about the real meaning of Christmas, remember that it is not just about the birth of a baby boy. That boy came in the line of David. David came as a fulfillment of the whole earth's longing for a king. And that baby boy is coming back. Christmas is about peace and love and joy because that is what Jesus will bring to the earth when he returns. Christmas is part of the larger story that God is telling. He has sent his king. His king is coming back.

Can you hear the drumbeat of that promise?

Conclusion

This week is the biggest holiday of our culture. Most of life pauses: schools let out, businesses shut down, people gather with families. The rhythm of our world stops during this week.

I hope and pray that you will enjoy this holiday season. But this season, that is meant to remind us of the importance of Christ, can often have the opposite effect. For some, it's a season of silence. Some miss the people who they once shared it with. Some endure loneliness when everyone else seems to have someone to share it with. For others, it's a season of noise. Parties and gifts and travel. It's a constant flurry of activities that leave little room for any reflection on the newborn king.

My hope for is that during this season, you would be encouraged to listen. Over the silence and behind the noise. Listen for reminders of this promise. Recognize the drumbeat in your grief or your loneliness or your laughter or your joy. Recognize the drumbeat in the life of our church. Recognize it in the work of God throughout the world. Look for it in the stories of David over the next several months. Look for it this week in the birth of a baby king in Bethlehem.

As you celebrate this Christmas season, remember the promise. The king was born. Can you hear the drumbeat? Will you listen? The king is coming

Endnotes

¹ OGIS 2.#458

² Wesley, Charles and Mendelssohn, Felix. "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." Public Domain. Songselect.com. 2015.