

JESUS' UNEXPECTED KINGSHIP

Luke 1:26-38

Every December, people around the world think about Jesus' birth. While Jesus' birth most likely took place in the Spring and while the date of his birth possesses no sacramental value, it is nevertheless a time when much of the world around us turns its attention to Jesus. As a family of people who have committed to following Jesus, we want people to think about him. So, we will take advantage of Christmas' focus to remind ourselves about the significance of Jesus' birth. This lesson begins our three-part series in which we will explore **Jesus' unexpected kingship**, **Jesus' unexpected salvation**, and **Jesus' unexpected kingdom**. Today we will consider how...

Jesus' birth is "good news of great joy"¹ because he is God's promised king.

"Good news of great joy"

- The Bible begins by narrating the violence, corruption, and abuses plaguing the world (*cf. Genesis 3-11*).
- God responded to the plagued world in an unexpected way - He committed Himself to a relationship with a man named Abraham and his family (*Genesis 12:1-3*).
- God remained faithful to His commitment even though Abraham's family proved to be as violent, corrupt, and abusive as the world around them. He remained committed because He promised to work through them to accomplish a purpose larger than that family - He vowed to work through them to bless "all the families of the earth" (*Genesis 12:1-3*).
- The Hebrew Bible slowly provides insights into God's promise, revealing that it would find its fulfillment in a future king who would usher in, and rule over, an everlasting kingdom of unending peace (*2 Samuel 7:12-16; Daniel 7:1-14; Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:1-11; Ezekiel 34:20-24; 37:24-25*).
- Matthew begins his gospel with the bold claim that Jesus is the one in whom God's promise finds fulfillment (*Matthew 1:1; 5:17-18*).
- However, Matthew's claim about Jesus introduced an uncomfortable reality for his audience - his declaration about Jesus' royal identity carried risk for people in his Roman-ruled world because everyone knew Caesar was king (*cf. John 19:16; Acts 17:6-8*).
- The circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth further heightened those tensions – despite the announcement that he was "born king of the Jews" (*Matthew 2:1-2; cf. Luke 1:30-33*), Jesus was born to unimportant people who lived in an insignificant place far away from the political and religious center of his nation (*Luke 2:22-24; Matthew 2:23*).

¹ *Luke 2:10*. All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.



- The tension between Matthew's claim and the reality of his world points his readers to a defining feature of Jesus and his kingdom - neither his rule nor his kingdom follows the pattern of the world's kingdoms (cf. *John 18:33-37*). For example:
 - Jesus did not define his kingdom by the physical boundaries used by the world's kingdoms (*Luke 17:20-21*).
 - He did not secure it through the same military means of the world kingdoms (*John 18:36*; cf. *Matthew 5:43-48*).
 - Jesus did not exercise his rule like the leaders of the world's kingdoms (*Matthew 20:20-28*; *John 13:3-17*).
- The unexpected circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth and the way he defined his kingdom prepare readers for the portrait Matthew and the other gospel writers composed of Jesus and his kingdom in their accounts of his ministry.
 - For example, Jesus' reign brings:
 - Redemption and rescue for the oppressed.
 - Hope and healing to broken people and a broken world.
 - Justice and order to a corrupted and disordered world.
 - Peace and joy to a world plagued by violence and worry.
 - However, Jesus ushered in redemption, hope, justice, and peace by:
 - Being a servant rather than exercising power.
 - Allowing himself to be falsely accused and executed rather than fighting for his rights.
 - Devoting much of his time and attention to the marginalized, powerless, and disreputable people in his world.

Applications

Jesus' royal identity and kingship did not match peoples' expectations, reminding us that we should not expect discipleship to him to follow our expectations. For example:

- Jesus does not define citizenship in his kingdom by residency, legal identification, or taxation. Instead, citizens of Jesus' kingdom live in all nations, and he requires them to peacefully submit to the governments under which they live.
- Rather than defining citizenship like the nations in our world, Jesus' identifies those who belong in his kingdom by their character. To be part of his kingdom, we must become people who:
 - Reject anger and seek reconciliation (*Matthew 5:21-26*).
 - Prioritize faithfulness and self-control over self-interest (*Matthew 5:27-32*).
 - Commit to honesty and integrity without qualification (*Matthew 5:33-37*).
 - Serve others rather than assert our rights (*Matthew 5:38-42*).
 - Love our enemies rather than retaliate against them (*Matthew 5:43-48*).

May God help us better understand the nature of Jesus' rule and kingdom so we can rightfully claim citizenship within it.

