

The King Has Come!

By Rev. David Bisgrove

The Bible provides vivid descriptions of the birth of Jesus Christ. Shepherds living in open fields are visited by a choir of angels (Luke 2:8-15). Angels appear to a young engaged couple, telling them that they are going to be parents of the world's Savior (Matthew 1:20ff; Luke 2:26ff). Men of means and education travel hundreds of miles to worship an infant. (Matt 2:1-12) Why are angels suddenly showing up in a rural village a few miles southwest of Jerusalem? Why is the powerful ruler of this region, King Herod, so threatened by the birth of this child that he orders infanticide? (Matthew 2:16) The answer is that the King has come!

For hundreds of years the people of God had been waiting for a King to come and restore Israel to its position of glory. This expectation is highlighted by Matthew's use of a seven hundred year old prophecy when describing Christ's birth - "for out of you (Bethlehem) will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel". (Matthew 2:6, quoting Micah 5) In other words, the writers of the gospels were writing the opening pages of the climax of: "a centuries old drama (during which the Jews had waited) for the turn in the story that would bring them out on top at last." ("The Challenge of Jesus", NT Wright).

The challenge for us today, is to think through the implications of what it means that the rule and reign of God has visibly come into our world. The effects of rebellion against God's rule are manifested in symptoms like greed, poverty, racism, war, and disease. The birth of Christ means that the great reversal of the curse of that rebellion has begun. Every parable and miracle of Jesus recorded in the Gospels points to this reversal. They are signs of renewal and rebirth that culminate in Christ's death and resurrection. As we celebrate and reflect on Christ's birth this month, there are a couple of practical ways to apply its meaning to our lives.

First, the fact that the King has come should be a source of Inner Peace. Quite often each of us is confronted with worry that occurs when we look at the future and believe that there is no ultimate guarantee of justice, righteousness and mercy. In other words, we don't believe that Christ is in charge of the world. We don't trust him when he says: "come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:27). We can become angry or bitter when our lives don't turn out the way we think they should. We might say something like: "I should have gotten that promotion by now." or "Why am I still single?" In other words, "If I were in charge of the universe, I would run things differently". However, worry and anger melt away when we remember that the God and King of the universe was born into a manger in an act of love and sacrifice. Not only do we gain an inner peace from knowing that the King has come, but we also live with an Outward Hope. Jesus gave sight to the blind, food to the hungry, health to the diseased, and forgiveness to the condemned. He was born into a world

aching for a King who would bring healing and renewal, and through his life, death, and resurrection that is what he has given us. Because of this, Christmas reminds of a hope that motivates us to make Christ's kingdom visible everywhere. Cornelius Plantinga put it this way: "Biblical hope has a wide-angle lens. It takes in whole nations and peoples. It brings into focus the entire created order – wolves and lambs, mountains and plains, rivers and valleys – (looking forward to a world) in which death, mourning and pain will have passed away." (Engaging God's World, Cornelius Plantinga). This is the desire of Redeemer– to live out the hope of Christmas in every area of our ministry, and that Christ will bring his renewing love to New York City. As we celebrate Christ's birth, our joy is that the King has come!

David Bisgrove has lived in New York City since 1988, the year he received his MBA and MPH from Columbia University. After working nine years in Healthcare Administration and Finance, David joined the Redeemer staff as Director of Finance and Operations in 1999. He was ordained in 2004 and now oversees the areas of Prayer, Evangelism, Worship, Stewardship, and Family Ministry. He lives on the Upper West Side with his wife Alice and their two daughters Mary Claire and Charlotte.