

Advent 2 The coming of the Messiah

T.H. White's book, *The Once and Future King* retold the legend of King Arthur. The glorious and just rule of Arthur in Camelot would seem to be modelled on the Millennial reign of Christ while the promise that Arthur would return to save Britain is inspired by the return of Christ. In fact, the Arthurian legend appears to have several Messianic parallels.

It is not surprising then, that the title could be applied to Jesus: The Once and Future King.

This season of Advent looks back to the first coming of Jesus in humility and forward to the second coming when he returns in power.

Isaiah writes extensively about the coming Messiah. The Messiah would be a future ruler, a descendent of King David, a great deliverer. Mysteriously from the Old Testament point of view, he is sometimes the great victor overthrowing the oppressors and sometimes portrayed as a servant, who suffers and dies.

In Matthew 3, we hear the announcement of the coming King. The Kingdom of God is near, because the King himself is near. John the Baptist starts to call people to be ready for the coming King.

When a really important person, like the Queen, comes into town, there is a certain amount of preparation and tidying up so things look at their best before she arrives. If she visits a factory, you can be sure that the greasy rags and dirty corners that have been ignored for decades will suddenly be cleaned up. Does everyone dress so well everyday? We did it last week for the re-opening of the chapel: pews and brasses were polished, extra flower arrangements, lawns carefully mown, the flower beds gardened. We wanted to present the buildings at their best and honour our guests and the visiting dignitaries by showing them we cared about their attendance.

That is a human response. Is that all John the Baptist was looking for? Of course, he was going deeper. It wasn't outward appearance but the state of the people's hearts that concerned him. He called them to repentance – to turn from their sins. And this repentance was to make a difference in their lives.

We also are called to repent. Whatever is out of line with the rule of Christ needs to change. We need to examine ourselves and make the hard decision to change where we are disobedient to Christ's ways. That might be to do with wrong acts or behaviours. It might be our failure to believe who he is and do the positive things he calls us to. It might be, for example, a refusal to exercise faith!

However, as Christians we do not go it alone. We have the gift of the Holy Spirit who helps us. We are not called to tough it out for God. We are to live by faith just as we were saved by faith. Paul wrote to the Galatians,

I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by observing the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?¹

God wants and expects us to ask for his help to live his way.

So we look back to Jesus' first coming. Then he gave us the example and the choice to follow him. He dealt our separation from God because of our sin. When he died on the cross he died in our place – he died as you, as me. So all the demands of the law on us were dealt with – finished. As we put our trust in his work, that is effective to free us from the penalty and separation of sin.

But the Bible promises that he will come again. The passage from Isaiah 11, speaks of that future reign. Remember, Jesse was the father of King David. So the term a shoot from the stump of Jesse means a descendent of David – the messiah. The theme of this Second Sunday of Advent is Peace. Jesus will establish a reign of peace when he returns when old enmities

¹ Galatians 3:2,3

are laid down. Isaiah speaks of carnivores at peace with their prey. Some take as a literal picture of that future state. Others see it as figurative with the animals representing human types and characteristics. Either would be a miracle actually! But the main point is that Eden is restored and (v9) “They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

Isaiah also tells us about the nature of the king. This is our saviour. This is the one we put our trust in. What is he like? Isaiah says he is just, righteous, faithful and peaceable. When he will judge, it will be with righteousness and justice. Wrongs will be stopped. He is clothed in righteousness and faithfulness.²

Who is this King of glory?

In his first coming, Jesus said he could do nothing unless the Father told him³. He showed total dependence on Father God and he acted in the power of the Spirit:

Matthew 12:28 “... if I drive out demons **by the Spirit of God**, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.”

Isaiah prophesied that the Spirit of God will rest on the Messiah. Just so, at his baptism, John saw the Spirit descend

² Is 11:5

³ John 5:19,30

and remain on Jesus. Then we are told more: This Spirit is the Spirit of Yahweh, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

I wonder if these seven characteristics are the seven spirits of God, John refers to in Revelation 5:6?

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

Whether or not this is the case, the Messiah has the Spirit of Yahweh. He is invested with wisdom, understanding and counsel. He is given knowledge, power and awe or fear of the Lord.

This ruler has all the good qualities you want. This is our saviour, who grants us his Holy Spirit too. Do we display those qualities too: wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, power and fear of the Lord? Just as we need to repent from the negatives so we want to turn towards the positives. These are qualities one could pray for: wisdom, understanding, counsel, knowledge, power and the fear of the Lord. The fear

of the Lord will help to keep us obedient and desiring him above other things. It is the beginning of wisdom.⁴

Isaiah 33:5-6 reads:

The LORD is exalted, for he dwells on high; he will fill Zion with justice and righteousness. ⁶ He will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the LORD is the key to this treasure.

If we are wise, or if we would be wise, we should seek to grow in the fear of the Lord. It is the key to knowledge, wisdom and salvation. It is not a craven fear. It is a deep respect, a reverence, an awe which makes one want to obey and please. Lord, help us to have that right fear of you, which makes us want your ways above all else.

Advent is a season intended for amendment of life. Like Lent, it is a season when we are directed towards repentance when we take stock of our lives and consider how we live. I pray that we will all deepen our walk with God the Father, in the peace that the Son has made for us and the joy of the Spirit.

To use Paul's words from the conclusion of the Epistle reading, "So may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him. So may you overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

⁴ Ps 111:10; Pr 9:10, 15:33