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*Various verses from Psalm 72 (NRSV)*

<sup>1</sup> Give the king Your justice, O God, and Your righteousness to a king's son.

<sup>2</sup> May he judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice.

<sup>5</sup> May he live while the sun endures,

and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.

<sup>11</sup> May all kings fall down before him, all nations give him service.

<sup>12</sup> For he delivers the needy when they call,

the poor and those who have no helper.

<sup>14</sup> From oppression and violence he redeems their life;

and precious is their blood in his sight.

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A woman came once went into a store and asked the storekeeper to cut her a key. After she paid for the new key, the woman went home to try it out. She went home to try it, and came back and said it didn't work. Four times she came back for another key to be cut, and four times without successfully getting a new key to open her door. The fourth time, the storekeeper told her that he was stumped—there was nothing else he could do to make a key fit her door. The woman replied, "Oh well, the original master key doesn't open the door either!"

Life is like that too - is it not? If we become as followers of false teachers, false masters, false messiahs, or false ways, we shall end up getting lost and travelling down dangerous and destructive roads. As we begin another New Year it is helpful for us to consider how we are following Him as our true Messiah-King, our Original Key, who opens the door of the year ahead of us. However, as we begin to explore this question of 'How are we following Jesus as Lord?' we also ought consider the question as to "What sort of king is Jesus?" If we say that we seek to follow and serve Him, as also ought to consider what sort of king Jesus is. Let us explore that question: What sort of King is Jesus?

At an immediate level we all would say that Jesus is our 'Saviour' and our 'Lord'. We know Him. We trust Him. We have faith in Him. But not everyone sees it that way. Indeed, there are many who ask the question "What sort of King and 'saviour' is this 'Jesus' when there is so much strife and trouble in the world?" Indeed, we don't have to look too far in the COVID testing chaos, the uncertainty and anger among people, and questions about the future of the world. Add to that all the tensions and conflicts around the world, so many places experiences chronic foot shortages, and so many other things, one may well wonder 'What sort of King is Jesus?'

What sort of king is Jesus? Today we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany of our Lord. Today we also remember and celebrate that Jesus is Lord of all the earth.

When you think about it, this is a very radical statement to make. We are saying Jesus is more important than Joe Biden, Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Boris Johnson, The Queen, Justin Trudeau, Jacinda Ardern, Cyril Ramaphosa, Narendra Modi, Joko Widodo, Mahn Win Khaing Than, Imran Khan, Emmanuel Macron, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, James Marape, Naomi Mata'afa, Jair Bolsonaro, Magdalena Andersson, or any other world leader you wish to name.

All of the readings today celebrate that Jesus is the true King. But when we consider the state of the world, the question is often asked, 'What sort of King is Jesus?'

As we celebrate Epiphany (properly speaking, 6<sup>th</sup> January) we are celebrating that God has revealed His divine rule to the world. Epiphany is a Greek word. It means, "to make manifest, to reveal, to show." The word, as we use it in the church year calendar refers, of course, to the making manifest, the revealing of, the showing of Christ to the nations as Lord and king of all. This is the ultimate message of our Psalm.

One of the major themes of the Epiphany is that now, in the fullness of time, God has chosen to reveal Christ to the Gentiles—that is, all of the non-Jewish nations of the earth – that in Jesus Christ God's rule has come into this world. That is the theme present in all of our Scripture readings for today. For example, in Isaiah we learn that: "Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. ... the wealth of nations shall come to you. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD." (Isa. 60:3, 5, 6). In our second lesson, Paul emphasises that he is an apostle called by God to preach to the Gentiles that Christ rules in every place. And today's gospel from Matthew continues this theme by fulfilling both the first lesson and Psalm 72, when the magi from the East—all Gentiles themselves - came to visit baby Jesus, and pay Him homage by offering Him their gifts, fit for a king.

When it comes to the question of Christ's rule over the world, and if any state that Jesus seems irrelevant because of all the troubles in the world, we are called to consider His words and His ways. Do not His ethical guidelines (as summarised and expressed in the Sermon on the Mount, and in His reaffirmation of the Ten Commandments and the like) point to a 'noble way of living' (a way of living which even most non-Christians do not fault – especially in the Second Table of the Law).

But there is another level at which we need to explore this question, "What sort of King is Jesus?" When Jesus stood before Pontius Pilate, at His trial, Pilate asked Jesus, 'Are you a king, then?' Jesus said to him (as recorded in John 18), 'You say that I am a King. But My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, My servants would fight to prevent My arrest. But now My kingdom is from another place.' Soon after this Jesus was crucified with a 'crown' of thorns, and a sign above Him that read, 'King of the Jews'. And at the foot of that cross a Roman soldier confessed, 'Surely this man was the Son of God.'

Properly speaking, Jesus is a failure in this world's eyes. He had no money. He had no wife. He had no family of His own. He did not promote in any way getting rich and making money (instead, He spoke more than anything about giving away what you receive to help other people). In the eyes of many people Jesus is a 'failure'. He didn't do any of the usual things associated with 'greatness'. And yet, when we see what our world sees as a 'failure on the cross' as Christ's ultimate act of royal power, it is then that we will see what makes Christ the true King of all.

What is Jesus' reign like? It is gentle. Do you see all the verbs in this Psalm? He delivers, He takes pity, He saves, He rescues. And who does He rescue? 'the needy who cry out,' 'the afflicted who have no-one to help', 'the weak and the needy.' This is the just and gentle rule of King Jesus.

What sort of King is Jesus? Christ's rule is a spiritual rule. But as a 'spiritual rule' it has practical temporal dimensions as well as eternal benefits. Christ is the One who brings justice and righteousness into this world (and therefore, into your life) – but not 'justice' and 'righteousness' as our human nature expects. Instead of 'punishment' for 'evil' (and an endless 'eye-for-an-eye' philosophy), Christ the King came to be crowned as 'king' on a cross. Here He brings forgiveness for you and me.

Have you ever—perhaps, in a moment of sheer desperation—cried out, “Where are you God?!” In Psalm 72, King Solomon writes a beautiful poem about God's Son—the Messiah. Solomon writes how the Christ would judge and defend His people. The Christ would “endure as long as the sun,” and “rule from sea to sea.” Solomon even foretold the events of the first Epiphany, when “Kings from Sheba and Seba will present Him gifts.”

Those kings from the east (or magi; wise men) sought out the very king Solomon describes in this psalm and they found Him, as a baby just like any other ordinary baby. The kings who had been waiting for so long to see their God, found an infant. And they worshiped Him! These men knew what we so often forget. Our God is not a God who revels in lording His power over His people. The all-powerful God who transcends time and space could certainly choose to be as visible as He wanted. Yet, our God chooses not to display raw power. In some ways (and in a proper sense) He remains a 'hidden God'. There is actually a theological term for that – *deus absconditus*. The idea behind the phrase is that God most fully reveals Himself to us when it seems He is most hidden.

Think about it. Where do we more clearly see the love of God, but in a manger and on a cross—two places that we would never look for God! Today, God reveals Himself through His Word, through the waters of baptism and in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. While the world does not look for God in such foolish places, we find him there and we worship Him!

This Christmas the whole world stopped because of Jesus. On no other day does the whole world come to a standstill, all in honour of a child born in a shed. Billions call on His name. Every day 25 000 Chinese call Him King for the first time. Every day 20 000 Africans gladly submit to His just and gentle rule. Every day 40 000 more Asians find heavenly blessing in Him. How do you account for it? The child born in the shed is ruling the world, from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. There's only one explanation: Jesus is the eternal Christ, the Son of the Father, the Hope of the Ages, the Desire of all Nations, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And this Christ is here for you. Look to Him and say to the Father – “Long live the King.” Recognise King Jesus, recognise His just and gentle rule.

What a relief to know that the throne of the universe is not occupied by cruel fate or impersonal forces. The throne is not occupied by an absentee landlord, or a distant god. Jesus occupies the throne. Jesus. He is ruling this world and this week. So take heart. He IS reigning. It might not seem that way to many in our world. The Jesus whose epiphany into this world we celebrate on January 6 came here to usher in God's kingdom of peace, of justice, of righteousness.

What sort of King is Jesus? We are to pray for world leaders and all in authority that they would seek to rule with justice and equity, that they would have a heart for the poor and those in need and who are disempowered, and above all that they would not abuse their authority and power. But above all, we are to praise God that we know His eternal rule and love in our lives because of Jesus. Thank God that He has brought us into the brightness of His dawn, through Jesus our Saviour. Amen.