

“Jesus: Lord”

January 3, 2021

Incarnation series – Epiphany Sunday – Livestream

Since we started this series in Advent, I’ve found myself thinking about my relationship with Jesus, what I tend to call him, how I pray to him, and why it matters. To be honest, it’s pushed me. To be a citizen of God’s Kingdom challenges me to work for it each day. To call Jesus my Savior means that I need saving. Jesus, Emmanuel, reminds me that I’m never alone – and that Jesus knows the struggles and joys of life. Jesus is how God speaks to us – the Word made flesh. Jesus is the Light of the world and calls us bear his light of love. He is Redeemer for all who seek new life. He is Lord, and that may be one of most challenging parts of my relationship.

Jesus is Lord is an early creed – a statement of faith used by early followers. And it was a clear challenge against earthly powers. People under the Roman Empire’s realm were expected to address the emperor as Lord, so for Christians to go against the empire was an act of rebellion. Both Matthew and Luke are clear that Jesus’ birth is the birth of *the* king and *the* lord – from heaven.

I’m a fan of English period drama – lords and ladies. My family will affirm it, but they don’t share my love for it. In Old English, the word for *lord* was connected to the person who had authority to distribute resources to the community. The lord was in charge and called to care for those under his authority – at least that was the hope.

To call Jesus *Lord* means that he alone has authority in our lives. We trust in him – his wisdom, guidance, protection, provision, and instruction. We serve him alone as our Lord. We have a relationship with him. We trust him with our lives, and he responds with steadfast love and grace.

That sounds good until we start considering who competes with Jesus in our lives. To whom do we give authority? Whom do we follow? Whom do we allow to lead us? Lord Jesus is a challenge when we understand that it’s a daily decision to submit to God’s will and yield our lives to Jesus.

When we talked about light in Advent, I mentioned the Great Conjunction between Jupiter and Saturn. There was a lot of buzz when it happened at Christmastime. And many wondered if it was a similar phenomenon that the magi saw when they journeyed to find a new king.

I had seen images from around the world and asked my close friend who lives in Namibia in Africa if she’d seen anything. Soon after, she shared this photo taken by a friend named Johann Veldsman at Ondundu Lodge in Kamanjab, Namibia **(SHOW SLIDE)** He wrote, “My attempt. I thought, since it is the “Bethlehem” star that a Shepherd’s

tree would make for a good composition. We have this old Shepherd's tree here at the lodge and the stars aligned perfectly with it." I love this image – not only for its beauty, but also for its meaning.

This photo reminded me that Jesus is truly Lord of all. God calls everyone to come to Jesus – from shepherds doing the dirty work in the fields to magi who were educated and probably wealthy, from Mary who came from a nowhere place like Nazareth to Zechariah who served in the temple to Simeon and Anna who were waiting with hope for God to act, and all the rest whom we meet every time we remember the nativity story.

They remind us that God calls us: the humble in status and those who come with humility, the ones without power and those who have to check their power in Jesus' presence, even those who stand up against earthly powers and structures and rebel against a king like Herod because of their allegiance to Lord Jesus.

Between the shepherds in Luke and the magi in Matthew, we get the whole world. And that's what the Epiphany is about – God comes in the flesh for all people, all nations, Jews and Gentiles - all. The magi are the first Gentiles recorded in Scripture to have believed in Jesus.

But another interesting wrinkle: they are Gentiles descended from the Babylonians. Their ancestors had taken the Israelites into exile. If there was any doubt that God welcomes all, that Jesus is for all the world, the magi confirm it. And we're challenged to embrace the promise – Christ is Lord of all and Christ is born for each of us.

The journey that the magi took was probably arduous. Scholars figure that they traveled many months – even up to two years and 1,000 about miles – to worship Jesus. And when they arrived, after stopping at Herod's palace, they found the infant Jesus in a house – nothing like the palace.

The magi challenge me to consider a few important things. First, am I willing to let go of what I assume is right or true and pay attention enough to let God lead? From a long journey to the encounter with King Herod and God's directive not to go back to him – and then having to change plans, it's quite a story. And I'll admit that this week has forced me to change some plans with the reality of a broken arm!

Second, I really do wonder how the magi felt when they found this new king Jesus in a humble home. Surely they're expectations were blown apart. But it's a challenge: will I come with humility, in humility, and worship? I love the words to a song called Carol of the Epiphany...

*I sought him dressed in finest clothes,
where money talks and status grows;*

*but power and wealth he never chose:
it seemed he lived in poverty.*

*I sought him in the safest place,
remote from crime or cheap disgrace;
but safety never knew his face:
it seemed he lived in jeopardy.*

*I sought him where the spotlights glare,
where crowds collect and critics stare;
but no one knew his presence there:
it seemed he lived in obscurity.*

*Then, in the streets, we heard the word
which seemed, for all the world, absurd:
that those who could no gifts afford
were entertaining Christ the Lord.*

*And so, distinct from all we'd planned,
among the poorest of the land,
we did what few might understand:
we touched God in a baby's hand.*

Every time I read that last line, that's the truth of the Incarnation. These words remind me what we share with Jesus – our humanity.

But they also remind me that you and I share something important with the magi - our humility. We come in humility as we worship. Jesus is Christ our King, Savior, Emmanuel, Comforter, Word, Light, Redeemer. He is Lord. We depend on him, and he receives us in love. All of the names and titles can't fully express the depth of God's love, but they help us to think about our relationship with Jesus.

The magi even challenge us to consider how we worship and where worship can happen. If we know anything by now, worship isn't confined to what we do in a building, but worship happens in our homes as we're connected to the Body of Christ. It happens in parking lots when we gather because of our shared faith in Jesus and light candles. Worship shows by how we live each day. We don't just say that Jesus is Lord; we live it.

Someone wrote, "The purpose of Epiphany is not to awe or impress us, but to invite us into God's loving presence." We're always invited into God's loving presence.

You're invited by Christ himself to a meal that shows his love and care for you and for the whole world.

So we come to the table, I invite us to pray. John Wesley offered a time of renewing our covenant with God. Many times, we do this at the beginning of a new year. This is covenant prayer...a challenging prayer as we commit our lives to Christ, whether we're renewing that commitment to serve him as Lord or making that commitment for the first time.

A Covenant Prayer in the Wesleyan Tradition

I am no longer my own, but yours.

Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will.

Put me to doing, put me to suffering.

Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you,

Praised for you or criticized for you.

Let me be full, let me be empty.

Let me have all things, let me have nothing.

I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.

And now, O wonderful and holy God,

Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer,

you are mine, and I am yours.

So be it.

And the covenant which I have made on earth,

Let it also be made in heaven. Amen.