

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

The 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship* called this Sunday “Christ the King” Sunday. The LCMS never adopted that hymnal, but revised it and published *Lutheran Worship* in 1982. Those editors changed the name of this Last Sunday of the Church Year to the “Sunday of the Fulfillment, which looks forward to the time when all things in heaven and earth will be together under one head, Jesus Christ” (*Lutheran Worship: History and Practice*, p. 163). Still, they made provision for observing “this Sunday as ‘Christ the King’,” with the texts they assigned. The way *Lutheran Service Book* assigns texts, the Sunday has just become the “Sunday on November 20-26,” that is, that falls in that range of dates. It’s actually a well-thought-out way of assigning texts, even if the name is not very inspiring.

Nevertheless, it seems to me that “Christ the King” is the theme of the day. The Epistle and Gospel, at least, are filled with references to Christ as king, to His reign, to His kingdom. And so we prayed today: “Lord Jesus Christ, You REIGN among us by the preaching of Your cross. Forgive Your people their offenses that we, being GOVERNED by Your bountiful goodness, may enter at last into Your eternal paradise.”

Truly, Christians have a king; Christ is our King. Of course, having ascended into heaven, and seated at the Father’s right hand, Christ lives and REIGNS “with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever,” as we pray. This kingly Jesus is depicted here at Zion in the southern-most of our chancel windows. Some of you may not be able to see it from where you’re sitting, but there stands Jesus crowned in glory, ruling with a scepter in one hand, ruling with righteousness and equity, the cross on top of the orb in the other hand, depicting Jesus as the sovereign of the world. *Salvator Mundi* that symbol is sometimes called—the Savior of the World.

But there is another window in the chancel depicting our King with a decidedly unkingly appearance, with a different kind of crown and a different kind of scepter. For before our King ascended to His heavenly throne, He had to experience a kingship of humiliation, hidden in incarnation and virgin birth— “*the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end*” (Luke 1:23-33); and again “*Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose*” (Matt. 2:2); hidden in poverty— “*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head*” (Luke 9:58); hidden in servanthood— “*For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve*” (Mark 10:45); hidden in weakness— “*Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey*” (Matt. 21:5); hidden in spite and shame—

*“And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head and arrayed him in a purple robe. They came up to him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ and struck him with their hands”* (John 19:2-3); hidden in rejection—*“Behold your King!”* Pilate said, but the Jew replied, *“Crucify him. . . . We have no king but Caesar”* (John 19:14-15); hidden in the foolishness of the cross, the righteous One hidden among the unrighteous—*“they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left”* (Luke 23:33); hidden in death—*“‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!’ And having said this he breathed his last”* (Luke 23:46).

Jesus came without *“form or majesty that we should look at him,”* with *“no beauty that we should desire him”* (Isa. 53:2). Yet it is by this Kingly appearance that our salvation truly was accomplished. In this way was our redemption won, *“the forgiveness of our sins.”* In this way were we *“delivered . . . from the domain of darkness.”*

This is what Kings are to do—to serve their people. I think perhaps our view of kings and other royalty is skewed by “once upon a time” fairy tales, with visions of fancy balls and sumptuous feasts, with princes sweeping princesses off their feet and living “happily ever after.” But the royal life is not all that; kings have duties; princes and princesses have duties; dukes and duchesses have duties — just ask the Duchess of Sussex Meghan Markle. In a recent British TV interview she seemed a bit overwhelmed by the royal life.

But as a fan of old movies, this thought of royal duty made me think of the movie *Roman Holiday*. Are you familiar with it? In it, Audrey Hepburn plays a princess who hates her regimented life in which she has no freedom and must always do her duty and say the right things. It’s a classic, also starring Gregory Peck. If you watch it, you’ll get the idea, for the princess does go on a one-day holiday, but she could not escape her duty. Indeed in the end she sacrifices the freedom she had for that day and the love she found to return to her royal duties.

So our King came with a duty; it wasn’t *“to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45). Jesus came as Christ the King, to be our Savior, to suffer and be crucified for us sinners. He came to bear on His body our sins, to triumph over them by His death, to nail them to the cross. He came to be smitten, stricken, afflicted, pierced, crushed for us (Isa. 53:4-5). He came *“to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.”* He came forgiving the world by His sacrifice, *“making peace by the blood of his cross.”*

Our King would not be deterred from this duty: not by the mockery of the Jewish rulers: *“He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!”*—that is, if He is king, the Jews sneered; not by the mockery of the

soldiers: *“The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’”*; not by Pilate who had *“an inscription [put] over him, ‘This is the King of the Jews.’”*; not by the criminal: he *“railed at [Jesus], saying, ‘Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!’”*

Of course, our King could have saved Himself, as He said, *“If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world”* (John 18:36). And so, *“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; ... like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth”* (Isa. 53:7). Or as St. Peter recounts, *“When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly”* (1 Pet. 2:23). And when the other criminal, who recognized Him as King, called out, *“Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom,”* Jesus reassured Him: *“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise,”* as He reassures us still: *“I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”* (John 14:3).

Dear saints, *“the Head that once was crowned with thorns Is crowned with glory now”* (LSB532:1). Our King has been exalted to the Father’s right hand, and He rules in glory in His everlasting kingdom. But our King will come again as the *“ruler of kings”* (Rev. 1:5), as *“King of Kings and Lord of Lords”* (Rev. 19:16). And when He does, the Father, who by His Son redeemed us and forgave us and delivered us out of the domain of darkness, will also, by His Son, welcome us into Christ’s everlasting kingdom, and we will experience not just paradise, but resurrection and life. This is our Christian consolation; this is our Christian hope.

Until that day, let us faithfully muster to our King by the preaching of His cross and by the reception of His body and blood. As we will shortly sing, *“The cross He bore is life and health, Though shame and death to Him: His people’s hope, His people’s wealth, Their everlasting theme”* (LSB532:6).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.