

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Americans have a bit of a love-hate relationship with royalty: kings and queens. We threw off King George’s tyranny in the American Revolution, yet we seem to love the royals William and Kate. We don’t anoint a king to rule us; we elect a president to execute the laws Congress passes. And yet, we do like to anoint our own kings: Elvis Presley as the King of Rock ‘n’ Roll, Michael Jackson as the King of Pop, and LeBron James of basketball fame as King James.

That’s as Americans, but as Christians it’s a bit different. As Christians, it’s no love-hate relationship with our king; we rejoice that we have a king, King Jesus. Indeed, on this Last Sunday of the Church Year our texts focus on Jesus as king. And so important to us at Zion is our King who reigns in heaven, that we have a stained glass window in the chancel dedicated to Christ the King.

Yes, Jesus is King, we proclaim, and not just as the Divine Son of God, but as the Son of Man. Certainly, the Divine Son of God, through whom all things were made and in whom all things hold together, has reigned as King from the beginning.

Jesus is the beginning, St. Paul writes. He is “*the first*,” St. John records (Rev. 22:13), and St. Paul says He is “*preeminent*.” Jesus is “*the Alpha ... who is ..., the Almighty*” (Rev. 1:8). Jesus is the Great “I AM,” who spoke in the beginning and made all things, who spoke to Moses from the burning bush as He effected His rescue of enslaved and groaning Israel. He is the one who would say through Moses, “*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. ‘You shall have no other gods before me,’*” something Israel often forgot. He is the one who lamented that Israel clamored for an earthly king, saying, “*Obey [them], for they have not rejected you, [Samuel,] but they have rejected me from being king over them*” (1 Sam. 8:7).

But, Jesus is not only the beginning; HE IS ALSO THE END; He is not only “*the first*”; He is also “*THE LAST*”; He is “*the Alpha AND OMEGA, who [not only] is [but] who was and who is to come, the Almighty*.” And that has everything to do with who our King is: not simply the Divine, but Jesus, the man.

Jesus came down from heaven to be just that: our King in the flesh. He who “*is the image of the invisible God*” is also “*the firstborn of all creation*”; He is the eternal Word who became flesh and dwelt among us. He, who as Divine King was rejected by Israel of old, was born into this world as King in the flesh and given “*the throne of his father David, [to] reign over the house of Jacob forever [in a] kingdom [that has] no end*” (Luke 1:32-33).

Of course, we know His kingship took a decidedly unkingly path—to the chagrin of many. The circumstances of His birth were anything but regal—born in a stable, laid in a manger; animals and shepherds His royal entourage; fleeing for His life to Egypt. Yet, those who had eyes to see would recognize Him as King; the Magi did and presented Him with royal gifts.

And, although from the beginning of His ministry, Jesus was recognized as King, He did not act as earthly kings. Nathanael confessed it right away, “*you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel,*” (John 1:49) and yet, this king lived not in luxury in a royal palace. He lived an itinerant life with no place to lay His head. Unlike earthly kings with their many servants to serve them, Jesus Himself took on the form of a servant, coming as a servant king—preaching, feeding, healing, serving. And when because of this service some wanted to make Him king in an earthly way, Jesus escaped from their grasp and withdrew. His kingship, His reign, would happen the way He and His Father had planned it—in a way that would end with mankind reconciled to the Father, with the blood of His cross making peace for mankind, with our redemption found in a King, despised, rejected, bloodied for mankind’s sins—and yet, in Him forgiveness of sins.

For, yes, Jesus’ kingship would take a decidedly unkingly path—we heard again today. Betrayed, arrested, mocked and scourged, executed in the cruelest way, a method devised by men who took pleasure in their savagery, yet noble Jesus spoke not a word. Crowned not with gold and jewels, but with a thorny crown of contempt; adorned not with royal robes but with a purple robe of ridicule; arrayed not with a jeweled scepter but a reed as a scepter of scorn—King Jesus bore it all. Crucified for being a king—the inscription over Him had it right: “*This is the King of the Jews*”—even though this King was no threat to Caesar’s earthly rule; His kingdom was not of this world. A murderer and insurrectionist was released rather than let this King, who did nothing wrong, go.

You know all this and you know it all had to be—that’s what YOUR sin required; that’s what YOUR going astray, following YOUR own way rather than His way required; that’s what YOUR rejection of King Jesus required.

Of course, He could have saved Himself and come down from the cross, as those reveling in His suffering goaded Him, but He didn’t because He desired to save you. That’s what the Holy Trinity had planned from before the world was even made. That King Jesus, the Almighty, who is first, who is before all things and who holds all things together, would become last, taking on our flesh, becoming “*the firstborn of all creation*”; that He who is King from the Beginning—the God by whose word all things were made in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, the First and the Last in whom dwells all the fullness of God,

that He would become the End, going to a cross and being lifted up, that He might complete our redemption by His blood. “*Tetelestai*,” “*It is finished*” — the end (John 19:30). The devil is defeated; the power of sin is destroyed; man is delivered out of the domain of darkness. Forgiveness is ours, and peace, and the promise of paradise with our King until the day of our resurrection.

For our King Jesus not only died, but He rose again from the dead and ascended into heaven, and He is now “enthroned in heav’nly splendor.” Man with God now sits on the throne.

What a comfort that is! That He, who is “*the first and the last, the beginning and the end*,” is also the “*firstborn from the dead*,” the “*firstfruits*” of all who have fallen or will fall asleep in Him (1 Cor. 15:20), and therefore, this “*Alpha and Omega, who is and was and is to come*” “*will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep*” in Him (1 Thess. 4:14) when the “*Son of Man*” comes again in kingly glory to sit on his “*glorious throne*” (Matt. 25:31) to judge the world. For then your “*King*,” King Jesus, “*will say to those on his right—[to the sheep who heard His voice and followed Him, to those who by faith have been transferred to the kingdom of the Son, He will say], ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’*” (Matt. 25:34).

Yes, this truly is our King: King Jesus, not just the eternal Son of God reigning as King from the beginning, but the Son of Man, who by His incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension “has raised our human nature On the clouds to God’s right hand,” so that, “There we sit in heav’nly places, There with Him in glory stand. Jesus reigns, adored by angels; Man with God is on the throne. By our mighty Lord’s ascension We by faith behold our own.” (LSB494).

And “*When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory*,” (Col. 3:15) for this saying is trustworthy, “*[i]f we have died with him [like in Holy Baptism, where we have also been joined to His body, the church], we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him*” (2 Tim. 2:11-12). Count on it. Our King is faithful; He keeps His promises.

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