

Session 1

***Incarnation: Rediscovering the Significance of Christmas***

By Adam Hamilton

Introduction and Chapter 1: "Presidents and Kings"

December 2, 2020

**Introduction Recap...**

The word "incarnation" comes from a Latin word that means, "embodiment" or "become flesh". One of the foundational beliefs of Christians is in the incarnation, that God actually became flesh in the person of Jesus. The church has struggled throughout centuries to explain the "how" of this mystery. Instead of focusing on the "how", Hamilton in this book seeks to answer the questions "why" and "to what end" for Christians today.

Some of the questions that will be asked include:

- Why would God come to us in Jesus?
- What was the purpose of the Incarnation?
- How are we meant to respond to the Incarnation, to God's coming to us in Jesus, today?

In each chapter, Hamilton will focus on one or more names/titles used by the Gospel writers as they introduce the story of Jesus. Hamilton encourages each of us to read one chapter each week during the Season of Advent, with the Epilogue read after Christmas Day or during Epiphany Sunday.

**Opening Activity – "Name the Presidential Campaign Slogan"**

- How would you describe the tone of the 2020 US Presidential campaign?
- How is a president like and unlike a king?
- What does it mean for you to call Jesus "king"? How meaningful do you find this title for him?

## Chapter 1 Recap...

Hamilton begins Chapter 1, “Presidents and Kings”, describing the political landscape of election time. Each of us can relate to this period with our recent national, state, and local elections. Roughly three weeks following Election Day, Advent arrives and Christians are called to prepare to celebrate the birth of their King, Jesus. Despite our political differences, all Christians are called to recognize there is one true leader, one “King”, Jesus. He is whom we owe our allegiance. Advent provides the opportunity for each of us to unite in Him. Whether we are Republican, Democrat, Independent, or Libertarian, all Christians should fall on our knees, just as the shepherds did, giving our hearts and allegiance to the newborn King.

Both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matthew 1:18, Luke 2:10-11) use a “royal” term to describe the birth of Christ, “Messiah”. Messiah derives from the Hebrew word *mashiach*, which means “anointed” or the “anointed one”. This term is used to describe an individual or object that has had a special oil poured over them to set them apart for God’s purpose. We see the earliest mention of the use of oil in Exodus chapters 28-30 to anoint the tabernacle by Moses. Centuries later, oil was used by Samuel to anoint the first human king of Israel, Saul. From this point on, every king of Israel would be anointed, signifying them being set aside holy to God, ruling on behalf of God, and doing God’s work. Many countries continue to use this anointing process for their leaders today (i.e. Queen Elizabeth II in England).

In Christianity, anointing with oil is commonly used in baptisms, confirmations, or even for the sick and dying. This signifies for the anointed individually that they too, belong to God. However, the anointing of “kings” is the act most closely seen in scripture. Those anointed were proclaimed as “messiah” – the Lord’s anointed. The archetype for scripture and all future kings was David.

King David reigned from 1010 to 970 BC. He was not the oldest “son” in his family, so his identification and anointing as king was fascinating. His name is mentioned over 1,000 times in scripture, more so than any other name – except for Jesus. He was not a perfect man or king, but God loved him, showed him mercy, and used him as a shepherd for his people. The Davidic Covenant (found in 2 Samuel 7) promised that a descendant of David would rule over God’s people forever. This promise served as hope for the Jewish people during the exile or under other foreign rule. This hope in a new, ideal king (seen echoed in Ezekiel 34

and other prophetic passages) became known as the “messianic hope”. One of the most quoted prophetic passages during the Advent season, Isaiah 9:6-7, proclaims this hope. Many scholars believe these words were spoken for the coronation of the new king, Hezekiah, in 727 BC, yet a “human” king could not fulfill the picture portrayed in this passage. Centuries later, the Jewish people were still yearning for such a king.

Luke 1:30-33 and Matthew 1:18 proclaim this desired king, “of his ancestor David”, “Jesus the Messiah” was born. Both Luke and Matthew, from the very start, wants the reader to know that the child whose story they will tell is THE Anointed One, the promised Messiah, the Christ, ancestor of King David.

Hamilton goes on to describe the approach to winning a presidential election. The ultimate prize being inauguration, parties, residence in the White House with security, leader of the “free world”, and controlling the most powerful military in the world. However, the One King, Jesus, was born in a stable, grew up in an obscure village in Nazareth, raised as a “handyman”, and did not have billions of dollars to support him. He began his “campaign” at the age of thirty, traveling from town to town giving “stump” speeches about the Kingdom of God, calling people to love God, each other, and their enemies. He called his followers to be humble, asking them to take care of the “least of these”, decrying any sense of arrogance or hypocrisy.

The disciples were his campaign staff, ill prepared as they were. His finance team were the women or others who provided support for his work. Hamilton writes that Jesus on the campaign trail may seem like a stretch, but that his disciples probably saw it just as that. However, the “campaign” of Jesus went completely against the grain. Instead of aligning a force to drive the Romans out, he instead encouraged his followers to love them and any other enemy. Jesus alienated the powerful and rich, instead spending time with the poor and low. His action plan was not about taking over power from the Romans, but instead to meet the “least of these” in the world. He encouraged each to take up their cross and let their light shine to others. All who followed would be a part of the Kingdom. The citizens of this new Kingdom would “love God with all their hearts, souls, minds, and strength, and they would love their neighbors as they love themselves.” (p. 33)

To be called “messiah” was another way of saying “king”. Jesus’s anointing as “king”, however, was different from any other. His anointing did not come at

the hands of a high priest, but instead the hands of three women (Luke 7:36-38, Matthew 26:6/Mark 14:3, and John 12). In all three instances, the women anoint him to honor him, unaware that their acts point to Jesus as being the Messiah, the anointed one. Jesus coronation occurs by Roman soldiers, who crowned him with thorns. His reign, however, did not end with his death. Three days later, his reign would last for eternity. “God’s reign is expanded with each person that chooses to follow Christ as their King, living the gospel he proclaimed.” (p. 36)

Jesus spoke of the “Son of Man” (him) would return. This image is captured in Revelation 19 and 21. Right now, humanity lives in the “in between” – between the triumph of Easter and Christ’s return. Even in the midst of darkness and suffering, we live as followers of King Jesus whose kingdom is breaking through into the world through his followers. Today, nearly 1/3 of the world’s population claims Jesus as King. (p.38) The Jewish prayer, “*Barukh ata Adonai Eloheim, Melekh haolam*” (which is translated “*Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe*”), is understood by Christians that this King, the King of the Universe, chose to walk among us. The Father sent His Son into the world so the world would know who the King truly is. The Son then sent the Spirit to empower us to live out the love of Christ. (p. 40)

Despite our politics, Christians should know who their King, the true ruler, is. His laws for the kingdom are found in the Sermon on the Mount, his parables, and his great commandments. Our allegiance to Him is above all allegiances.

### **Follow Up Questions...**

- Hamilton thinks Advent should be a season of unity for Christians. Have you experienced Advent in this way? How?
  - How easily or often do you think of Jesus as royalty?
  - Who in the 21<sup>st</sup> century culture and society is considered royalty? Why? How do these “royals” compare and contrast with Jesus?
1. What ceremonies or rituals, in church or larger society, are people identified or “set aside” for a special function or purpose?

### **Scripture Focus – 2 Samuel 7:1-16**

- Why is David troubled by where the ark of God is stored? What is your opinion of David's plan?
- How does God respond, through Nathan, to David's plan? What does God promise to David?
- What leaders from your congregation or community's past do you remember during difficult times? How do these memories sustain and motivate you?
- What dangers, if any, arise when people idealize their leaders from the past?

### **Scripture Focus – Luke 1:26-38**

- How do Gabriel's words about Jesus echo ancient messianic hopes? How does this factor into Mary's, a devout Jew's, thoughts about the angelic words?
- Have you ever considered Jesus's public ministry as "his campaign for the office of King"? How helpful do you find this metaphor for His work?
- How did Jesus's resurrection on Easter validate his status as King for his followers?
- How confident do you feel this Advent season in Jesus's ultimate triumph as King? Why?

### **Closing Questions...**

1. How important, if at all, do you think it is for modern Christians to continue calling Jesus "King"? Why?
2. What other titles or images, if any, would help people today understand Jesus in the way the title "King" does?

**Closing Prayer (Read in Unison)**

*Eternal God, through the ages your people have longed for a righteous ruler who will speed up the day your will is finally done on earth as in heaven. In Jesus, your Anointed One, you anointed us to do your will as citizens of your kingdom. By your Spirit, keep us strong and hopeful as his faithful and obedient subjects. Amen.*

**Next Week**

***“Incarnation”* Session Two**

**Wednesday, December 9      6:30 PM      Facebook Live**

**Reading – Chapter 2 in *“Incarnation”* – *“The Savior and Our Need for Saving”***

**Scripture – Matthew 1:18-21, Luke 2:8-14, Genesis 3:1-13, Romans 7:18-25**