

## REJOICE! A KING IS BORN!

2 Kings 22:1-10; 23:1-3

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Today we began Advent with a Children's message that invited and involved every person here to be part of "THE STORY." We had fun with it and rejoiced because we know A KING IS BORN and we enjoy hearing and telling the story. We rejoice because we know that this isn't just any king—in fact, we know that this "king" is rich in all the qualities and more that a person might hope the ideal king or person would have. We know that this king is not rich in material property as most kings usually are, but rich in wisdom and insight about relationships with persons and with God. We know and celebrate that JESUS IS BORN! Because of this, we can be filled with HOPE!

All through history, ancient and modern, many countries have celebrated royal births, especially if the child was male and heir to the throne. Our scripture today is about Josiah and his time in history. His story can enlighten us as we enter Advent. Josiah was the heir descended from a long line of kings. Josiah was eight years old when he became king of Judah, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem, the religious and political hub of the kingdom.

Even though history has few records of Josiah's life, he is immortalized in the Hebrew scriptures and in the gospel of Matthew as being part of the genealogy of Jesus. The Hebrew scripture is full of prophecies shared by prophets as messengers of God and often these messages were words of hope. A prophet 300 years before Josiah, had prophesied about "the man of God out of Judah" and people believed Josiah fulfilled that prophecy because from a young age, Josiah did "what was right in the sight of the LORD." (Prophets were an integral part of the religious sphere. As Advent continues, we will hear of prophecies that pointed to the Messiah and provided details that were fulfilled in Jesus.) Josiah already understood that there was spiritual sickness in his land. Idols were sprouting up everywhere. Josiah began his search for God by cleaning up and destroying whatever he recognized as not belonging to the worship of the true God. In the process, God's Word was rediscovered in the temple at Jerusalem. King Josiah's intentions and the power of God's written revelation were brought together.

As the Book of God's law was read to Josiah, Josiah was overwhelmed by God's Holiness and immediately tried to expose his people to that Holiness, by reinstituting the Passover celebrations. Josiah opened the scriptures to his people so that they could hear the Holy Word of God, just as Jesus opened the scriptures for us. The people did respond to Josiah as he shook up his people with a spiritual revival of his own, bringing HOPE and change into their lives.

Advent, this 4 week time of preparation for Christmas, can be a spiritual revival for us Christians today. I think all of you are here because....

You hope during Advent to counterbalance the consumer Christmas of the secular world....the absorption with things and money, grabbing and getting.

You hope to be awe-filled, not feeling awful! You hope to prepare your hearts and spirits to receive the coming of the Christ child into the world.

Each of you hopes that not only Advent and Christmas but *every day* is a meaningful time for you personally and for your families.

The spiritual revival that we are looking for...hoping for.... is really a spiritual TIME-OUT.

In sports, time-outs are important. After watching many football games, I still don't really understand the intricacies of the game, but I always observed and noted that after a TIME-OUT, the team had new energy, a new direction, and a new sense of teamwork and commitment to the game. The TIME-OUTS effected the attitudes as well as the actions. That "One Minute Huddle" provides time to: step back, look at where we are, ...evaluate where we've been, ...identify what works and what doesn't, ...develop a game plan to move ahead.

For us here in this time--Advent-- and in this place--MCC--, a "TIME-OUT" gives us a chance to see a larger picture and vision of the game, AND what God has in place for each of us in our lives.

LET'S TAKE A "TIME-OUT" and step back into the 6<sup>th</sup> century, when the church had begun to celebrate Christmas and reorganized its calendar from a Winter Lent that was observed from Nov 11 to Jan 6, Epiphany and shortened it to 4 weeks and named it Advent. Advent originally was the season of Winter Lent, a time of Penitence which was a way of tempering the joy of Christ's impending entry into the world with the recognition of one's own sins and shortcomings. The Puritans did try to go back to an austere, purified version of Advent. The answer for us though is not to try and go back to this austere "Winter Lent." We live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and we can't pretend that the cultural season does not exist, but we can find a spiritual "TIME-OUT" that works for us now.

During Advent when we celebrate Christ coming into our lives take a "TIME-OUT" --- step back and look at where you are....Do you find yourself preparing for "the holiday Christmas" rather than the sacred observation of a Holy Day? Time spent preparing for HOLY DAYS, like Advent, should be a TIME-OUT to slow down the wheel of whatever rat race we're usually competing in and to see just where it is we're heading.

The power and grace of a HOLY DAY spills out over everything and everyone we encounter. Preparing for the HOLY DAY of Christ's birth should mark us as Christians before our colleagues and friends.

TIME-OUTS have a way of helping us get our minds off ourselves. We are able to see others in the game, in our family, in our community and larger circles far beyond. TIME-OUTS may give us a sense of going back, of reconnecting to what has been important in the past and important teachings we may have lost track of. In the book *Resident Aliens* the authors tell the story of a rabbi in Greenville, SC who used to challenge the values of the society around him by

telling his children, “That’s fine for everyone else, but it’s not fine for you. You are special. You are different. You are a Jew. You have a different story. A different set of values.” Perhaps it’s time for Christians to say the same kind of things to their kids at Christmas time. “That’s fine for everyone else, but it’s not fine for you. You are special. You are different. You are a Christian. You have a different story. A different set of values.”

Please pray with me:

O God, as we enter Advent may we focus on “who Christ is” and rejoice that Jesus was born to be a king like the world had never known before or since. May we be persons of Hope. May we take a TIME-OUT to reflect, search, re-energize, listen and pray that we may use our time wisely, together, in following the Advent game plan and Jesus’ footsteps already there for us. Amen.

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