

It's almost here! Can you feel it? The excitement, joy, and hope that comes with Christmas? Very soon, we'll enjoy this great celebration of the birth of Christ along with wonderful times spent with family and friends, scaled back as these may be this year. And of course, there will also be delicious food to enjoy of which I have no plans of scaling back whatsoever. Yes, soon Christmas will be here, and it will be as joyful as we can make it, but nothing lasts forever. Soon Christmas and the buildup to this most wonderful time of the year will be over and then it will be back to the regular routine of life. The gifts we give will hopefully last a long time, but we know: Clothes wear out over time, kids will outgrow their toys, that is, if the toys don't break first. Well at least the memories we associate with Christmas will last, that is, as long as our mind's **ability** to remember lasts. Nothing lasts forever, not the things of this world; not even our minds and our bodies in their present form.

This morning though, we are reminded from God's Word, that we have all been given something that will **never** get old. It is a gift that will never wear out or break. That gift is Jesus Christ, the King who was born on Christmas, whose reign lasts forever and ever. He's the One the angel Gabriel spoke about to the Virgin Mary in our Gospel today. He told this young lady that she was going to give birth to a son and look at how this son is described: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And 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." (vv. 32-33). This isn't the first time that Jesus is described like this. In our Old Testament lesson for this morning, God told King David about the Christ: "He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."

The first thing you notice about this eternal kingdom is that it is hidden. Sometimes during Jesus' life, you could see that He was a king. He would heal people, raise people from the dead. But our God is a God who delights in hiding His glory. He hid His glory in the Virgin Mary – no one would have ever guessed that she was carrying the King of Kings who would reign forever. On Christmas Eve, God hid His glory in a feeding trough. There Christ lay, the commander in chief of the army of angels. And years later, God hid His glory again, this time on a cross. No one would have ever guessed that the man hanging on the middle cross was the Son of the Most High, the One who would reign over the house of Jacob forever. God hides

His glory there, as He bears the sins of the world and allows Himself to be condemned in order to save you.

God still hides His glory today. We want to see awesome and impressive performances from God. We want something to point to, something to look at, something that impresses and excites us. But our God is a God who delights to hide His glory even today. And yet, He does tell us where we can find Him. Unbelievers will try to find him in their own lives, but there is nothing there but sin. Some will look for Him in nature. Some will try to find Him by inventing religions that seem logical or just feel right to them. But our God is a God who hides His glory.

He tells you that you can find Him in only one place in this world, and that is the humble place of the Gospel, His Word and Sacraments.

Although God's Word is spoken and shared by sinful people, the Gospel is where you can find the glory of God. Here in the story of Mary, or the story of David. Here you find God's glory, the eternal kingdom of the Christ.

What would you say is the mark of a successful ruler, whether he or she is president, a monarch, or a prime minister? Perhaps the biggest mark of success for any ruler is peace. Political peace. Economical peace. International peace. Most rulers in our world today are trying to either maintain or establish peace for their people. But no matter how good they are, the peace they set up never lasts. Sometimes with little or no warning there's a war, or a recession, or a pandemic. Suddenly things aren't going well in the country that they are ruling. King David and his son Solomon both enjoyed a time of peace in Israel, but shortly after their reign, everything went downhill in a hurry. Isn't that how it is in our lives, too? Peace never lasts there either. For a while, everything may be peaceful with your health, but then suddenly, that is not the case.

Everything is peaceful financially, but then out of nowhere you're hit with a huge set-back and you're struggling to make ends meet. Personal peace, national peace, international peace— all of it's temporary. All of it's fleeting. Just like the build-up to Christmas.

That's what makes Jesus Christ such an unusual king. He sets up a kind of peace that never ends, a kind of peace that goes on and on forever. It's not a political kind of peace, or a financial kind of peace, or an emotional kind of peace. The peace that Jesus sets up is peace between you and God. Our holy God is no longer angry with you because of your sin, although He has every right to be. And you no longer have to be afraid of God because of your sin. Jesus takes your sin away and has established peace between you and your

Heavenly Father. That's the kingdom that Jesus sets up, the kingdom that the angel spoke about to Mary – a kingdom of eternal peace between you and God.

But how do you become a part of this kingdom? That's what makes this kingdom very unique. You're not born into it in the way that people are normally born into the kingdoms and nations of this earth. Ever since Adam and Eve, no one has ever been born into the Kingdom of God by natural birth. And you can't earn your way into Christ's kingdom by being a good person. Nor can you buy your way into it.

A person becomes a member of Christ's kingdom of peace by believing something that sounds incredible. I must believe that although I may feel like I'm a pretty decent person, I'm actually sinful and unclean. I must believe that this Child born in a holding area for animals, lying in a manger, is God. I must believe that Christ, although He seems so humble, gives me His righteousness and that takes away my sin. Even though I can't see the glory of God, I must believe that it is here, in the manger, and that it is here, on the cross. When the Holy Spirit works on my heart, through His Word and Sacraments, and leads me to believe these things, that is how I become a member of Christ's eternal Kingdom. There are no exams, no tests. God simply asks me to believe that He did all this for me.

Do you realize that if you had been the only sinner in all the world, God still would have done all this for you? He still would have been born on Christmas. He still would have died on Good Friday. He still would have risen from the dead on that first day of the week. If you had been the only sinner in all the world, Jesus would still have done all this for you. Believe it, and you are a member of Christ's eternal kingdom.

This is something you have that will never grow old, that will never fade away. The devil will try to take it away from you, but the devil is powerless against those who are in God's Word. Christ's kingdom is God's eternal gift to you, a gift that will never fall apart. There is eternal peace between you and God, and Jesus, your King, will someday take you home, and there you will reign with Him forever.

It's true that life in this world is getting scarier. If nothing else, 2020 has taught us that. Morality continues to decay. Our bodies continue to get older. World peace and personal peace come and go. Nothing lasts forever. Except what you have here, in God's Word. Your sins are forgiven, forever. You are a child of God, forever. Jesus has been given the throne of David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever. His kingdom will

never end. Because of Christ, you do have a reason to be excited, a reason to be a person full of joy and hope this Christmas and always! Amen.