

December 17, 2017

King of Kings

Matthew 2:1-12

Pastor Wayne Puls, Senior Pastor at Hope Lutheran Church

Last Sunday here at Hope we enjoyed the excellent Christmas Cantata presented by our choirs. The highlight, for me, was the “Hallelujah Chorus.” *[play music]* And there it is. I’ve heard this piece of music hundreds of times in my life, but it never fails to move and inspire me.

Now, I love listening to all different types and genres of music. I’ve enjoyed many varied praise songs and hymns. But, for me, this music, the “Hallelujah Chorus,” is just about as perfect an acclamation of Christ’s glory and majesty as I’ve ever heard.

I have a somewhat embarrassing story to tell about the “Hallelujah Chorus.” When I was 19 or 20 years old, I went to a party at a friend’s house. Among the crowd was a bunch of guys that I played volleyball with, many of them from my church, most of them older than me. We were downstairs in the basement with food and drink, playing cards and shooting pool, listening to rock and roll records, cassettes, and 8-tracks.

Then one of my friends, who sang in the church choir, came downstairs, and said to me, “Wayne, you read music, right?” “Yeah, why?” I asked. He just grabbed me and dragged me upstairs to the living room. Sitting at the piano was a woman who was the assistant choir director at the church, and one of her friends. “We need a fourth person to sing the ‘Hallelujah Chorus.’ You sing bass,” my friend said to me. I protested, but eventually I set my drink down and we actually sang a quartet version of this great song. Just another

example of how peer pressure can make you do some weird, unusual things.

Now, I want you to know that I've never before or since sang the "Hallelujah Chorus," belting out "King of kings, and Lord of lords," at a social gathering. Some of you may do that regularly, but I'm just not that kind of guy.

In our Bible story for today, there's someone who pretended to be that kind of guy. King Herod wasn't singing the "Hallelujah Chorus," but he pretended that he wanted to acclaim and honor the baby Jesus as his true king.

This King Herod was the ruler of the Jewish nation at the time when Jesus was born. Herod was the local ruler, but the real ruler was the Roman Emperor, Caesar Augustus. Herod was king in Israel, and all the Jews had to answer to him; but he still had to answer to Caesar. Herod was Caesar's man in the region, though; so he amassed tremendous power and wealth. Herod was the man.

So imagine how displeased King Herod was when, one day, a group of Wise Men from the east came wandering into Jerusalem, Herod's capital city, inquiring, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?"

Now, the Bible doesn't tell us exactly when this took place. Historical legends tell us the Wise Men came looking for Jesus just a few days after his birth, but it might have been a considerable time after. The story doesn't say if there were three Wise Men, or more, or whether they rode camels.

But we do know what they were looking for. "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

King Herod was not happy. His immediate analysis was that there was a potential threat to his rule out there, and his

immediate instinct was to eliminate that threat. But, first, he had to find this child, this would-be king of the Jews.

So Herod pretended. He pretended that he wanted to worship Jesus, too – pretended that he wanted to go to a party and sing the “Hallelujah Chorus” along with the Wise Men. He tried to trick them into finding Jesus, then reporting back to him, so he could have the Christ Child killed.

The Wise Men were not pretending, though. They were ready to meet Jesus, their King of kings and Lord of lords. They had followed the star, and they somehow knew God was guiding them to their Savior. The Wise men brought gifts suitable for royalty, but didn’t give them to King Herod. They were eager to fall down on their knees and adore Jesus.

What about you? Where do you fit into this ancient, timeless story? I’m not asking if you’d come to my house today to sing the “Hallelujah Chorus” around my piano. But I’m asking you this today, on this Sunday before Christmas Eve. Are you willing to say that Jesus Christ is the King of all kings? Are you eager to acclaim him as your king? Are you able to not just say that he’s the King of kings, but to live your life accordingly, as if Jesus really is the king, the ruler, the monarch, of your life?

What about the gifts you bring today, and the kind of worship you offer him here? Do they give testimony to what you really believe about Christ? Do your everyday words and actions during the week give any indication that the top guy, the highest authority in your life, isn’t you, but him?

Who is this Jesus? Just some historical figure that you’re willing to talk about, and maybe sing about, for an hour a week? Or is Jesus, the baby born in Bethlehem, the Messiah

who came to suffer and die for your sins, actually your King of kings and Lord of lords? Does he actually rule you?

This part of the Christmas story makes it clear, friends. There's no pretending. Not with God. He always knows your heart. God always sees your true motives, and senses the genuineness of your intentions toward him.

And at the first Christmas, not everybody got it. Not everybody grasped that the baby Jesus was actually the omnipotent Son of God. The Wise Men got it. King Herod only pretended. His selfish ambition distracted him, and his lust for power prevented him from acclaiming Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords.

So this Christmas, don't let anything distract you. Don't let any of your important plans, priorities, to-do lists, social obligations, peer pressures, holiday traditions, cultural trends, or anything else prevent you from doing exactly what the Wise Men did. Come with faith before your King, the King of kings, this Christmas. Joyfully bring Christ your gifts, and offer him the worship of your heart.

Hallelujah! Amen.