Today is the first Sunday of Advent, which means “coming.” As the video said, it is a season of the church year that is meant to be for preparing and getting ready for the coming of Jesus. Today, we begin a new sermon series called Unwrapping His Presence. The daily devotions will explore a number of the names of Christ—a different one each day—to help us understand who Jesus is and all he has done for us. Then, each Sunday, we will explore the titles of Christ and what it means for Jesus to be the Son of David, Son of Man, Son of Mary, and Son of God.

Speaking of sons, a son was born in July to Prince William and his wife, Kate. It is interesting to me how much the world loves to hear about this royal family—even Americans, who chose not to have a monarchy centuries ago. And there was some excitement and anticipation as the world waited two days to learn what this son would be named: George Alexander Louis. Names are important because they are tied to our identity. And the names of rulers are important because they are tied to the history of the people they lead.

For the past twelve weeks, we have been looking at the life of a king—King David, who was considered the greatest king of Israel because the kingdom was finally united under his reign. It is fitting that today we should begin our new sermon series by looking at Jesus’ title “Son of David.” You may recall that after David became king, he wanted to build a house for God—a temple. But God said no. “You will not do something for me; I will do something for you.” God made a covenant with David: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

All the kings of Israel descended from David. The Davidic dynasty lasted about 400 years and then was cut off when the temple and city of Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were taken into captivity in Babylon. It was a devastating time for Israel because in exile they were cut off not only from the land, their kingdom, but also God. But during this period of great darkness and disappointment, when it seemed like all was lost, there...
was hope and a growing confidence in the faithfulness of God, who had made an everlasting covenant with David. Isaiah was written in this period and contains many prophecies. Today, we look at Isaiah 11: “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.”

The imagery of a stump is striking. There is a house in our neighborhood that has a stump in the front yard. There is no life in it; it is used as the base for seasonal decorations. It is an apt description of the experience of Israel around the period of the exile. The Davidic dynasty is dead with no life or power or authority left. David’s name isn’t even mentioned—only his father Jesse, who was never king, perhaps indicating there is no royal dignity left in the house of David. But do you hear the joyous hope in this passage? Out of what looks like a dead stump will come a new and living shoot. Small at first, seemingly insignificant, but there is life, and that life will rise up and become a fruitful tree.

The shoot and branch are images that point to the promise of the Son of David—the “anointed one,” the “Messiah.” But equally important is the image of the roots because it was always understood that the story of the Messiah was connected to the story of Israel—God’s chosen people.

So let’s look at what we learn about the promised Messianic King, the Son of David, from this passage.

The first part of this passage deals with the character of the king: “The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:2-3a).

The “spirit of the Lord shall rest on him.” The Spirit represents the active and creative divine presence known at creation and in the inspiration of prophets and the anointing of kings and other leaders. And the spirit of the Lord gives three pairs of gifts that describe the character and credentials of this new ruler.

Practical wisdom will enable this ruler to face reality and deal with it fairly, and carry out the tasks required in political and judicial matters. And Israel knew well that rulers who lack understanding can be cruel oppressors. “Counsel” and “might” refer to the exercise of authority as in diplomatic and military judgment. The third pair, “Knowledge” and the “fear of the Lord,” refers to the ideal king’s relationship with God and ability to exercise spiritual discernment. The
The point of this passage is that the Messiah was to be perfectly endowed by the Spirit with everything required to fulfill his kingly task.

One commentator says that the Spirit of the Lord plus the three pairs describing the ruler adds up to seven—a number of completeness and wholeness in Jewish thought. The point of this passage is that the Messiah was to be perfectly endowed by the Spirit with everything required to fulfill his kingly task.

Verses 3-5 describe the reign of the Messianic king: “He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.”

The nature or effect of the king’s reign will be the establishment of justice and righteousness. The quality of his justice will not depend on external testimony or “hearsay” or political spin but the quality of his character and true spiritual discernment. This Davidic king will always do the right thing and exercise power to protect the weak. This is what the people of Israel—this small and vulnerable nation—had hoped for but never fully realized with each new descendant of David. Isaiah saw the Son or descendant of David as God’s means of implementing God’s will, first for Judah and Jerusalem, and then for the world as a whole.

That leads to verses 6-9, which describe the quality of the kingdom: “The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

The quality of this kingdom is so distinctive that there is no need to fear the fiercest predators. Even a little child, the most vulnerable person, will be safe against the deadliest creature. You have heard it said, “There can be no peace without justice.” Do you see the connection? It is the just reign of the king described in verses 3-5 that gives rise to the period of peace described in verses 6-9. This is the vision of a world where human beings can live safely and securely in peace without fear. This is only possible under the ideal ruler.

The peaceable kingdom is the subject of this painting by the famous American Quaker artist Edward Hicks
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The painting portrays verses 6-9, but off to the side of the beasts and little children playing together there is a scene of William Penn and other leaders making a treaty with the Native Americans, reflecting the vision of both peace in nature and peace among nations. Think of what it would have meant for Israel—a small, vulnerable nation under foreign oppression—to have the hope depicted in this passage.

The passage closes with these words: “For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” This is not merely knowledge about God. It is referring to knowledge of God—an intimate relationship with the King of the universe that results. His reign will result in Shalom, in peace in relationship with God, with others, and with the whole of creation.

This week, as I was preparing for this sermon, I was struck by the incredible claims about the Messiah, who he is, and what he is able to do. And then I wondered who or what do we believe is the ultimate source of wisdom and guidance? In his book The Divine Conspiracy Dallas Willard writes: “The mantle of intellectual meaninglessness shrouds every aspect of our common life. Events, things, and “information” flood over us, overwhelming us, disorienting us with threats and possibilities that we, for the most part, have no idea what to do about.

Commercials, catch words, political slogans, and high-flying intellectual rumors clutter our mental spiritual space. Our minds and bodies pick them up like a dark suit picks up lint. They decorate us. We willingly emblazon messages on our shirts, caps—even the seat of our pants. Sometime back we had a national campaign against highway billboards. But the billboards were nothing compared to what we now post all over our bodies. We are immersed in birth-to-death and wall-to-wall ‘noise’—silent and not so silent. We are an information age.”

We not only live in an information age, we are actually addicted to information. Think of how we spend our time: we read, we watch TV, listen to the radio, go on line, study, and get educated. We know a lot, but is all our information leading to transformation? Is it leading to a life filled with love, joy, peace, justice, hope? The passage challenged me to think about who and what I am listening to. I like the words of Richard Rohr: “Our desire to know more, read more and study more can be another expression of our culture and its acquisitive nature. Knowing God, not knowing more, is the goal.”

What does it mean to know God? We know God through Jesus. Jesus himself said, “And this is eternal life, that they
They do not convey the understanding of what it means for Jesus to be the Messiah, Son of David, the Reigning King.

The promise in Isaiah of the coming Messianic king was given hundreds of years before Jesus’ birth. The people of God did eventually return from captivity and rebuild the temple, but pagan foreigners were still ruling over Israel. They were in their own land, but they were still slaves under a foreign and oppressive regime. They were still experiencing a kind of exile. And it is in that context that Matthew begins his gospel, which those of you following the devotions read on Friday. But let’s look at the first verse of Matthew: “The account of the genealogy [family tree] of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matthew 1:1). There is that title “son of David” and the Messianic hope. A long list of names follows, which many skip over because they mean little if anything to us. But Matthew is writing from a particularly Jewish perspective, and he wants his readers to understand that the story of Jesus and his birth cannot be separated from the story of God’s people Israel. Jesus is the climax of the story of Israel, and Matthew makes that point explicit by recounting all the generations from Abraham to Jesus.

We may find it curious that Matthew concludes his genealogy by stating: “So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah, fourteen generations” (Matthew 1:17). But those numbers would have meant something to a Jewish audience. As N. T. Wright points out in his wonderful book How God Became King, “Every seven days, they [the Jews] had a Sabbath. Every seven years, they had a sabbatical year. And every seven-times-seven years, they had—or at least they were supposed to have had—a jubilee. This was when slaves were freed, when land sold off was restored to its original owner, when things got put back as they should be…. All the generations of Israel’s history from Abraham to the present…were fourteen times three, that is six sevens—with Jesus we get the seventh seven. He is the jubilee in person. He is the one who
The goal of life is to live life in the kingdom of God—to do what Jesus would do in our marriages, families, neighborhoods, work, recreation, and on and on.

will rescue Israel from its long continued nightmare. ‘He,’ says the angel to Joseph, ‘is the one who will save his people from their sins’” (Matthew 1:21).

This is not just personal forgiveness of sin. Exile is the payment for sin, so forgiveness of sin means the end of exile—not just for Israel but for the world, for all those separated from God.

All the years of waiting for God’s king to come have been realized in Jesus. In his life, death, resurrection, and ascension he has done for us what we could not do for ourselves. And when Jesus begins his public ministry years later, he declares, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” This is not merely a call to feel sorry for our sins or to accept forgiveness for them. It is an invitation to choose a different and wiser course of living. It is an invitation to live in the kingdom of God—right here, right now.

In his book, The Divine Conspiracy, Dallas Willard defines the kingdom of God very succinctly: “The kingdom of God is the range of God’s effective will, where what God wants done is done.”

When we pray the Lord’s prayer and say, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven,” we are asking for God alone to be King over all the world and more specifically over our lives.

Dallas Willard goes on to point out in his book that we, too, have kingdom: “Every last one of us has a ‘kingdom’—or a ‘queendom,’ or a ‘government’—a realm that is uniquely our own, where our choice determines what happens. Here is a truth that reaches into the deepest part of what it is to be a person…. This is the core of the likeness or image of God in us and is the basis of the destiny for which we were formed. We are, all of us, never-ceasing spiritual beings with a unique eternal calling to count for good in God’s great universe. Our ‘kingdom’ is simply the range of our effective will.”

The goal of life is to live life in the kingdom of God—to do what Jesus would do in our marriages, families, neighborhoods, work, recreation, and on and on. We choose to mesh our kingdom with his kingdom as we trust in him, rely on him, and count on him. Living in the kingdom of God is learning to live my life as Jesus would live it if he were me.

I challenge you to consider what it means to mesh your kingdom with the Kingdom of God—where your choice determines what happens. How do you keep before you this Advent the reason for the season? How do you keep before you the truth that Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords, and it is his birthday—not yours? How will you celebrate the holy days of Advent and Christmas in a way that truly brings love, joy, peace, and gratitude?
Some of us may want to simplify our celebration in order to keep Christ at the center. Others many want to balance the noise and busyness of the season with some time for silence and solitude. Read and reflect on the word through the daily devotions. I encourage you to make time for worship; not only on Sundays but by building into your family celebrations things like the Advent Workshop, and other worship services and concerts listed in the bulletin. Consider whom you might invite to join you in celebrating. And be intentional in the way you give this season and so participate in Christ’s concern for the poor and those in need.

Each of us will need to think about what this means for us in the course of our lives, but ask yourself: What does it mean for Jesus to be the reigning King in my life this Advent and Christmas season? How does that impact what you choose to do and to remember that His Kingdom is the range of your effective will?

For me, Advent and Christmas are also a time to reflect on my life and consider changes I may need to make for the New Year. How will I arrange my life to live in the kingdom of God? How will I learn to live my life as Jesus would live it if he were me? How will I become more like Christ together for the world? A new year is an opportunity to write or update a Spiritual Growth Plan. You can find a copy of one in the back of the Advent Devotions.

Jesus is the Son of David, the reigning king. I pray our Advent, Christmas, and New Year will be filled with the love, joy, and peace that come from living in his kingdom here and now. Let’s pray.