

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Midweek Advent  
December 20, 2020  
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran  
***He shall reign forever***  
— Luke 1:26-38

The year was roughly 1000 B.C. King David was in a palace and the Ark of the Lord was in a tent. David wanted to build a house for God, a temple for worship. But the Lord always seems to have bigger and better plans than we do. Here's what God had in mind: ***'The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: <sup>12</sup> When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*** A Son of David would reign as king for ever and ever. That was the promise.

As you keep reading the history of David and David's family, you notice a sobering reality as each generation comes and goes. At the end of David's life, ***"David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David."*** He died and he was buried. Then you read about King Solomon, he had so much promise and wisdom, but he strayed from the Lord and promise turned to disappointment. At the end of his life we here the same sad refrain, ***"He rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father."*** He died and he was buried. Solomon had a son, his name was Rehoboam and he too sinned and strayed from the Lord. At the end of his life, the same sad song repeats, ***"He rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the city of David."*** He died and was buried. Keep flipping through the books of 1 and 2 Kings and for nearly everyone of David's decedents you hear that same refrain. One them, Hezekiah, was actually on his deathbed and he pleaded with the Lord and the Lord spared his life. But fifteen years later, he died too. Some of those kings in David's line were considered "good"—they did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Others were very bad—they did what was evil in the eyes of the Lord. But it made no difference. No matter what they accomplished during their reigns long, or short, right or wrong, that sad refrain keeps ringing throughout David's family. They died and were buried.

We don't always take such a broad look at life and contemplate that reality—the reality that in the grand scheme of things our days are numbered, just as our ancestors before us. Instead we become nearsighted. We get caught up in the moment and in the business of life. We so easily can slip into living for today instead of preparing for eternity. We search for meaning and security in our own achievements. The things we accomplish or the possessions we amass can become the measure of success in life. We may even accomplish a lot of good things. And the not so good things we'd like to conveniently fade into the past. But that's not how it works. We die because we have sinned. No matter what we've accomplished during this life, death will one day claim us just as it did David and all his descendants after him. After all nothing lasts forever, so it seems.

Remember the promise God made to David. A Son of David would reign forever. Fast forward from David's day about 1000 years. By then the glory days of the Davidic kingdom were ancient history, so it seemed. The Angel Gabriel comes to Mary, a descendent of David, and yet she's not in a palace, she was not recognized as royalty in her day. In fact, Scripture indicates that Mary was quite poor. But it makes no difference, Gabriel announced that hope was still alive. He said, ***"Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end."***

Mary was understandably shocked and puzzled. She asked, ***"How could this be?"*** It doesn't mean she doubted, but she wanted to know more details, she wanted to know the logistics so Gabriel told her, ***"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God."***

That made all the difference. All the sons of David who came after David were mere men. No wonder they fell short. No wonder they all went down to the grave. But this son of David is the Son of God. He is God from eternity and he is the king who shall reign for eternity. But by the world's standards, he sure didn't look like a king. Many in Jesus's day were waiting for a messiah, the promised Son David to come and rule like an earthly king. But Jesus didn't live in a palace. Jesus didn't ride in a royal chariot. But he did what no other son of David could do. He healed the sick; he raised the dead; he calmed storms; he spoke and taught like no one had ever heard. Even in such humble appearance, people flocked to Jesus because in him was so much promise and hope. But, from an earthly perspective, it seemed that promise was turning to disappointment, even for Jesus disciple. His own people, the people he came to shepherd and rule by his grace, rejected him, arrested him and crucified him. It seemed like that sad history of David's family tree had repeated. He died, and he was buried.

Like every other one of David's descendants, Jesus died. But remember, he's not just David's Son, he is the Son of God and he proved that by rising from the dead. All the things accomplished and all the victories won by the Davidic kings in the end made no difference. They all went down to the grave because the wages of sin is death. All the things we accomplish, things we amass in this life, all the little victories we celebrate all fade into the past. But everything Jesus did matters eternally. He did what no other human being has ever done. He kept God's Law in its entirety without stumbling even the slightest. Even the "good" kings of David's line stumbled and fell into the temptations common to every human. Even our most righteous acts are filthy rags; they do not garner God's favor. But every thought, word and action of Jesus Christ has gained for us God's eternal grace and favor. Everything Jesus did mattered in life and in death. For us, death isn't thought to be an accomplishment; it's quite the opposite. The death Jesus died was not a normal death; it wasn't just the grave claiming another body as a result of the one person's sin. It was a death that paid for all sin, and for your sin. The death of God's eternal Son accomplished eternal salvation for literally a world of sin.

Yes. He died and was buried. But on the third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty. From there, he will come to judge the living and the dead. And his kingdom will have no end. He shall reign forever. His resurrection is victory over death. Not even death will last forever, but Jesus's kingdom and victory endure forever. Because he lives and rules forever, you too shall live with him forever and ever.

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This Advent, may God give you a faith like Mary's. Her circumstances didn't change after the angel's visit. She was still poor. It's not like she could go and get an ultrasound right way to verify that she really was pregnant. She'd still feel the pains of birth and give birth to an ordinary looking baby. And yet look how she responds to the proclamation. ***"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me as you have said."*** She trusted that he was the King who would reign forever. 2000 years later, here we are. The same proclamation that Mary received comforts us despite what we see around us. As you look around things aren't always as they seem. From our perspective it looks like sin and unbelief have the upper hand in society. Our own sinful nature keeps rearing its ugly head. From our point of view it looks like death still wins every time it claims a loved one. But Jesus still reigns. He still has control and power over all creation. He still holds dominion over the devil all the evil in the world. He still holds the victory over sin and even death. And that truth totally changes the way we live. We no longer want to live just for the day, but we live for the Lord. Our life does have meaning as we do all things to God's glory. The Truth of Jesus' eternal reign give us a new perspective. Sin does not need to control us. The devil and his lies have no power. Death holds no terror. The one who reigns and holds the victory over all those things will come again and his kingdom will never end. Until he comes know this: He reigns in your hearts with his grace and peace, both now and forever, Amen.