

Two weeks ago, televisions and radio stations and newspapers and websites were filled with announcements that the words of Scripture that we read today were continuing to be fulfilled, as presidents and queens and rulers went to worship Jesus at Christmas services.

And I want you to think about that for a minute, because that fact alone, the fact that some of the most powerful men and women in the world today went to worship Jesus at Christmastime, that should make you praise God. Two thousand years ago, an evil king responded to the birth of Jesus with a murderous rage that left Rachel's daughters weeping for their children.

One generation after that, the representatives of Jesus were being crucified and cut in two by emperors and kings. For the next several hundred years, Christians were scorned, abused, persecuted, and martyred for Jesus' sake. The light of Christ dimmed and flickered, but miraculously, it never went out.

Then in 313ad, the Emperor Constantine supported the Edict of Milan, giving Christians legal status in the Roman Empire, and was baptized by Eusebius of Nicomedia. Kings had come to the brightness of the rising of Jesus, and since then, there have always been kings and nations that have fallen down before King Jesus and served Him. This is the light that arose through Jesus Christ, and the dawning of that light is what we celebrate at Epiphany.

And what I want us to see today is that the light of the world is not just a personal glow in our hearts. It is not just about you and your house serving the Lord. Though it shines forth in and through the church, as Ephesians says, it is not "the light of the church". This light is for nations and for kings, because Jesus is the light of the *world*. And so whenever we grow too comfortable with "personal flashlight Jesus", a Jesus who gives *me* light, or "chandelier Jesus", who lights up my house, or "lighthouse Jesus", who shines forth from the church, Epiphany comes along to rebuke us and remind us that we need Sun of Righteousness Jesus, the world's one true light.

There is only one sun in the sky giving light to the world, and every nation under heaven needs the light of that sun to survive. Think of how stupid and ridiculous it would be for a king or a prime minister to decide that their country would no longer use the sun for light! While the rest of the world gets light from the sun, we're gonna do our own thing! That's absolutely crazy!

But that's what every leader or ruler is doing unless they come and bow before Jesus and pay tribute to His rule in the world. It is even more foolish to pretend that you can exercise authority in this world without Jesus than it would be to cut off your country from the light of the sun. Ruling in Jesus' world without bowing to Jesus and ruling in Jesus' way is the quickest way to plunge your people into darkness.

But because the light of Jesus has risen in the world, the blessings of His reign are starting to emerge in this world where kings and rulers are drawn to His light. Isaiah speaks of it this way: "The abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. Camels shall come from Sheba, bringing gold and frankincense and good news, the praises of the Lord."

Israel had seen a preview of this under David and Solomon, the temple builders. They worshiped the true God, and the wealth of nations started pouring in to Israel, including the Queen of Sheba, who came to hear Solomon's wisdom and left utterly amazed. She's the forerunner of the Wise Men, certainly in terms of the Bible's story, but possibly even in terms of history – some people think that the Magi learned to expect Jesus from what she had learned from Solomon.

Psalm 72 adds even more to what we have from Isaiah, not just the *benefits* that will flow from kings who respond to the Light of the World, but the *kind of kingship* that the Light King will bring. Because the Lord's King brings justice and peace and righteousness, that's what leads to the prosperity that Isaiah promised. The Lord's King won't be a powerful king who takes stuff from other kingdoms to enrich his own people (that's what a good king was in the ancient world). No, the Lord's King won't just be powerful, He'll be *good*. He will show the nations a way to rule that doesn't seize riches by plundering the poor and weak; this King creates wealth by establishing a just and peaceful kingdom where the poor and needy are especially cared for!

That's what the other kings and rulers respond to: a new way to be king, a way that *blesses* and *serves* and *creates* instead of *dominating* and *crushing* and *destroying*. This king only crushes the oppressors and the unjust and the unrighteous. He protects and defends His people. And the light of that just and peaceful and compassionate kingdom shines forth with the glory of God.

And in Ephesians, Paul looks at each step of our expectations from Psalms and Isaiah, and takes them further: God's plan to draw nations and kings to His king? It's Jesus, and in fact, the mystery is that Gentiles are fellow heirs along with us. It's not "our nation is better than your nation". It's about all nations being drawn to the light of Jesus.

The wisdom of God about how to rule by blessing the weak and needy? That's on full display to the world through Christ's Church, and not just earthly kings, but even the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places!

The great wealth that will flow from godly rule? Listen to Paul in v.8. He says: "I get to preach about "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Again, I'm reminded of the queen of Sheba visiting Solomon. She said, "Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard." Unsearchable riches; incalculable wealth, indescribable blessings! Paul says, "That's all in Jesus."

And here Paul brings it to a powerful conclusion in vs. 11: "This was according to the eternal purpose that [God] has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord." Everything Psalm and Isaiah talked about, everything previewed by the splendor of David and Solomon, all of it was realized, or accomplished, or came to fruition in Christ Jesus! King Jesus is the light of the world!

And how do we access it? How does Christ's kingship come to us? Vs. 12: we have boldness and access to the wisdom and wealth of God *through our faith in Jesus Christ*. We cannot miss this point: it's not enough for kings to *admire* Jesus. It's not enough for them to go to Church at Christmas. It's not enough even for them to try to *imitate* Christ's rule; you can't have the light of the sun *without the sun*. You can't imitate Christ's rule without faith in Christ. It just doesn't work. The light of the world does not bless the world without faith. You must put your faith in Jesus Christ, and submit your kingship, your rule to Him, so that *He* can rule *through* you. Faith in Christ is *everything*.

This is why even when we praise God that rulers publicly honor Him by attending worship services for His birthday, it is all for nothing unless real faith in Christ is present! It is a triumph for King Jesus that other kings publicly acknowledge Him. But at the same time, a king who honors Christ outwardly, but chooses to rule as if the light of Christ doesn't matter is a hypocrite, and hypocrites don't receive kingdom blessings. They keep stumbling in darkness.

That's what we see in Matthew, as we have two kingly responses to Jesus' birth. When the light of the world is born as the King of the Jews, *the Magi* respond straight out of the pages of Isaiah, bringing gold and frankincense. *Herod* responds by trying to blot the sun out of the sky.

But here's the scary part: what did Herod *claim* he was doing? "Tell me where he is, so that I too may worship him." Tell me when the Christmas service is, so I can attend. It's possible to go to a Christmas service one day and try to kill Christ the next so that you can keep ruling the way you want to. Herod ruled by oppression and murder and crushing the weak, and he was at least smart enough to know that if a king came bringing justice and righteousness, no one on earth would keep following Herod! So Jesus must be killed. The light of the world must be snuffed out by those who love the darkness.

I began by pointing out how President Trump and Vice President Pence and the British royal family's public worship of Jesus fulfills what our texts have been speaking of: kings coming to the light of Christ. Outwardly, at least, they have chosen to walk in the footsteps of the Magi. But that's not the whole story. The light has dawned, the sun is rising, but we have not yet reached the full brightness of day.

A couple weeks before Christmas, Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, China, was raided by the civil authorities, and their pastor and leaders and dozens of their members were arrested. Many of them were charged with "inciting subversion of state power." In other words, they believe in and call people to follow a king greater than Xi Jinping, greater than the ruler of China. The birth of Jesus still terrifies our Herods today.

And so this is the challenge for kings today: how will you respond to the light? Like the Magi, bringing gifts and worship, or like Herod, with deception and murder? China, like Herod, makes deceptive claims about worshiping Jesus. Our own rulers claim to honor Jesus, but the test comes in whether or not they come to Him in faith and allow Him to rule through them.

And so I want to use our texts today to tell our rulers what it means to truly come to the brightness of King Jesus' light. I know our president isn't here and won't ever be aware of these words, but I want you to know what to expect of a president who comes to the light, what to ask a president to do. What does an enlightened king (a king who has "seen the light" of Jesus) do?

First, an enlightened king seeks Jesus and worships Him, putting His faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. A king who does not trust and worship Jesus is walking and ruling in thick darkness.

Second, an enlightened king brings treasures to Jesus. As Ephesians 3 says, the rule of King Jesus is manifested now through the Church. Does the king enrich the Church? That's what kings do when they come to the light. If your take on separation of church and state means that this can never happen, then you are walking in darkness.

Third, an enlightened king breaks down false divisions and pursues unity in Christ. This is what happens in Ephesians 3 – ethnic pride is removed, because Jesus is king over all. An enlightened king would seek to end racism and ethnic strife, or caste systems, and would not allow the justice system to favor the rich and oppress the poor.

Fourth, an enlightened king would refuse to help Herods who harm Christ's body, just like the Magi who refused to cooperate with Herod. An enlightened king would not share the wealth of his kingdom with kingdoms who oppress Christians. Since Christ's rule is what blesses a kingdom, partnering with a kingdom that attacks Christ will only lead to darkness.

Fifth, an enlightened king would rule according to Jesus' standard of justice and righteousness. He would not be ashamed to apply Jesus' lawbook to his own kingdom, not in a clunky copy and paste fashion, but with sober wisdom. If a nation's laws are not grounded in the law of Christ, darkness will spread.

Sixth, an enlightened king will focus on justice for the poor, defending and delivering the needy, and crushing oppressors. An enlightened king would treat the blood of the weak as precious. It is impossible to read Psalm 72's praise of a king who treats the blood of the weak as precious, and Matthew 2's tearful account of Herod's murder of Bethlehem's children, and not conclude that an enlightened ruler, a ruler who cared anything for the light of Christ, would fight with heart and soul to crush the evil oppression of abortion from our land. There are others who are weak and needy that an enlightened king would also defend, but none more obvious than this: an enlightened king would save babies from murderous slaughter.

A king who ruled like that would reflect the light of Jesus. His rule would be like rain falling on the mown grass, like showers that refresh the earth. The righteous would flourish in his days, and peace would abound. Kings and nations would honor him, and glorifying God for the wisdom of his rule.

And the good news is that we have just such a king. King Jesus is ruling and reigning over the earth from His throne in heaven, and throughout history and to this day, the brightness of His light is drawing nations and kingdom to come and worship.

And so our thanksgiving today centers on this: thanks be to God that our light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon us through Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. And this is our prayer: "May all kings fall down before him, all nations serve him!" And may we as Christ's Church continue to make the wisdom of God known to all rulers and authorities, so that they might rejoice over Jesus, and join us in worshiping Him.

- *In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.*