

II Samuel 7:1-7  
Luke 2:1-20

Christmas Eve Candlelight Communion Service  
Midway Presbyterian Church  
December 24, 2021

## **Fit for a King**

### *Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson*

Behind our Old Testament Lesson from II Samuel is the memory of a day when moving about was a way of life for the Hebrew people. What little they owned, they carried with them. Following the Exodus from Egypt, an entire generation grew up and died out in the wilderness, moving from one place to another. And there was no king. But in our lesson, they have a king, and he has a temple, “fit for a king,” and King David wants to build God a house. Listen to these words from II Samuel 7:1-7...

### *Introduction to the Gospel Lesson*

Our Gospel Lesson this Christmas Eve certainly counts among the most familiar passages in the Bible. The humble birth of Jesus is set against the backdrop of a mighty empire and powerful rulers. Listen to these words from Luke 2:1-20...

### *Sermon*

All those years in the wilderness, the Hebrews dreamed of the day when they could settle down in the land promised to them. They wanted to live in houses that sheltered them from the bite of the wind. They wanted to sleep on beds and not on the ground. They wanted to possess a land and be part of a nation. And like all the nations they knew, they wanted their own king.

Well, they got their king in Saul. But he was more like a military leader than a royal king. You could take Saul out of the wilderness, but you couldn't take the wilderness out of Saul. When young and handsome David replaced Saul, they watched a shepherd who was used to the fields change into a leader who watched over a nation. And they changed with him, from

those who knew the manners of the campfire meals in the wilderness to those who knew the table manners of the home.

In our Old Testament Lesson from II Samuel, we find that the King and the people naturally assume that what they wanted for themselves, God would also want for himself. After all, a tent is no place “fit for their king,” nor for their God. They assume that what the people want from God, God also wants from the people. So, David graciously offers to build God a house, even more grand than his own.

But Nathan the prophet receives from God a shocking response to David’s offer,

“Are you the one to build me a house to live in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. Have I ever asked, ‘Why have you never built *me* a house of cedar?’” (II Samuel 7:5b-7b)

Truth is, God has no desire to live in a house. As it turns out, God likes life in a tent just fine. We all know that while the Hebrews were wandering in the wilderness, they the “tent of meeting” outside their camp—*outside* to symbolize that God was *with* the people, but not *of* them, not beholden to their every want and wish. But the constant presence of that simple tent reminded them throughout those long, hard years, that God was always with them. No matter how great their need, or how desperate their situation, God was with them.

God was with them in Babylon meeting exiled people. After they have lost their homes and their land, God meets them in the foreign land. At first the people sit down by the waters of Babylon and weep, thinking that by losing their homes, they have lost their place with God. But within a short time they discover that they didn’t lose God. He’s with them, even in the valley of the shadow of exile.

Now let’s fast-forward to those events that we celebrate this Advent and Christmas season. We believe that Jesus came as the Son of David. We believe that Jesus came as the new

King David, in that he came to bring together and lead the people of God. That he came to create a kingdom, not of this world, but the kingdom of heaven.

But notice where this king is born. Not in a palace. Not in a house. Not even in an inn (for there was no room for him there). No, his birth takes place in a stable, and his first bed is a feeding trough commandeered for that purpose. And this king is accompanied by lowly animals.

One's first reaction might naturally be like that of David. A stable and a manger are no place "*fit for a King.*" They are no better than a tent. And yet, that is where this king is born. That is where the Son is given. And upon his shoulders are placed the kingly titles, "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace."

The manger *is* a place fit for this king. For the child born to Mary is more than a son of David; he is the Son of God. He is Emanuel, God with us. This king does not reflect our dream to be safe and secure. God chooses the instability of being born to a poor family from a nowhere place. He chooses to be born outside, so that he can make a home where his people are in need. When this child grows to be a man, he seeks out lepers whom others will not touch. He stops in the middle of a crowd to attend a woman with an issue that others would rather not deal with. He invites little children to come to him and blesses them. He listens to a hated Centurion and interrupts his own itinerary to go to the Centurion's home where his daughter is dying. He eats with tax collectors and sinners.

And at the end, this king's throne is not a jeweled chair with minions waving peacock feathers. His final earthly throne is two pieces of rough wood nailed together in the form of a cross, to be used as a means of public execution. This king ends his earthly rule by suffering and dying between two thieves for the sins of his people; and through his death and resurrection, he brings new and eternal life. God chooses the cross for the same reason he chooses the manger;

so he can have the freedom to meet people at their greatest needs—and there are no greater needs than dealing with our sin and facing our death.

You may recall the story about the woman visiting a tourist town in December and stopping in front of an old cathedral. As she stared at the beautiful stained-glass windows, a strange feeling of peace came over her. She hadn't felt that way since childhood, and she knew a deep yearning to attend church again. Kneeling before the Christmas scene, she studied the figure of the Christ-child whose arms were outstretched. She wished with all her heart that those arms were reaching out to her. She remembered Christmases of long ago when her family attended church together. The Nativity scene then was lit with colored lights, and pine branches scented the church. Afterwards, friends invited her family to breakfast. They would return home from sharing fun and laughter, and then exchange gifts. They sipped hot chocolate and listened to bells toll Christmas joy throughout the town.

But that peace, love, and warmth had largely disappeared from her life. Christmas was lonely and cold. Because of rebellion as a young woman, she hadn't gone to church in many years. The pain and the bitterness of remembering seared her heart. But as her tears fell, she felt a gentle hand on her shoulder. A kindly priest looked down at her.

“Father, I'm so miserable,” she blurted out. And she told him the story of her turning away from God, and of her bitterness, her loneliness, and her fear of going back to church. He replied, “My child, the church is for people still suffering. Jesus has already forgiven you.” “He came to seek and save those who are lost.”

Well, those words rang in her head long after the priest had left. She felt the bitterness slipping away. She knew that Christ had reached out to her. She knew that Christ was with her. She knew that Christ loved her.

Perhaps it was good that David got his palace. But it is better for us all that the Son of David, who is Christ our Lord, got his manger and his cross. It is especially good for those of us who know our need. To know that we are not God-forsaken when we are hurting. That God has not isolated himself in a celestial palace from which he will not come out to where it is cold and dirty to find us.

Know this: if you are grieving this Christmas, God wants to be close to you. If you feel alone this Christmas, God has time to be with you. If you feel uncertain and confused, God wants to give you his peace. If you are sick, God wants to give you his wholeness. If you feel that the world has passed you by, God leaves the crowd and takes the detours and byroads to find you, and be with you, embrace you, and bring you home. If the eternal King of all creation will be born in a manger, he will visit a person in prison, a home for hurting children or children with special needs, a young person quarantined at college at Christmas, an elderly person in a nursing home. For no place is too lowly, too common, too uncomfortable, too stark, that God will not be right at home with his people.

To reach his throne of grace, we don't have to worry about getting past soldiers guarding his palace. God in Christ won't even let his own disciples deter the little children. He welcomes and blesses them. He meets us grown-ups where we are. He invites all who labor and are heavy laden to come to him. That is why the words spoken to poor shepherds out in the fields are still true:

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. (Luke 2:10-11)

Amen. And Amen.