

WORSHIP

DECEMBER 10, 2023

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT BETHLEHEM SUNDAY

LIGHT THE BETHLEHEM CANDLE

PRAYER

The city of Bethlehem is mentioned 41 times in the Old Testament and 8 times in the New Testament – all in the Gospels.

Bethlehem gained significance within historical Christianity because both **David** – whose kingdom is eternal, and **Jesus** – who is the eternal King, were born in Bethlehem. David is the only king given a promise from God that his kingdom would last forever (**II Samuel 7:12-16**). Jesus is the only one God has exalted so that one day, **every** knee will bow to Him and **every** tongue will confess that He is Lord (**Philippians 2:9-11**).

Sadly, from the time of David's death until the birth of Christ, the majority of David's descendants who ascended his throne did not live up to God's requirements for perpetuating the rule of David's lineage forever. However, God remained faithful to His promise in spite of the sinfulness of David's descendants. Paul reminds us of this kind of faithfulness in **2 Timothy 2:13**, "If we are faithless, [God] remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself." And in His faithfulness, God fulfilled His promise to David in and through Jesus Christ.

From David onward, Bethlehem has been known as the City of David – representing his kingly rule. However, in the Hebrew language, Bethlehem means "House of Bread." Therefore, today we will look at Jesus as our King and as our Bread of Life.

HYMN #178

O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM
(Sing vs 1,4, Read vs 2,3)

BETHLEHEM SPEAKS OF THE KINGLY RULE OF CHRIST:

Bethlehem was a small city within the territory allotted the tribe of Judah. It is about six miles south of Jerusalem, and at the time of Jesus' birth it was estimated to have had a population of about 600 people.

We get our first glimpse of the importance of Bethlehem to Jesus' kingly rule from Jacob's blessing of his son, Judah. Even though Judah was Jacob's fourth son, Jacob blessed him as if he was his firstborn son. We will only read a portion of Jacob's blessing, but as we do, take note of how specific parts of it apply to Jesus. (#1) **Genesis 49:8-10**, "Your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a young lion . . . The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet . . . and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples."

Those closing words, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet," describe Jesus, who is a direct descendant of David through the bloodline of his mother, Mary, and a direct descendant of God through the Holy Spirit – who provided what was necessary for the God-man Jesus to grow in Mary's womb. It is His unique conception and sinless life that made Jesus the only king who **could** fulfill God's promise that David's kingdom would never end. The following scriptures confirm this.

PSALM 89:3-4 (#1)

God said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant, [4] 'I will establish your line forever and make your throne firm through all generations.'"

LUKE 1:31-33 (#1)

You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. [32] 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, [33] and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.

PSALM 24:7-10 (#1)

Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. [8] Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. [9] Lift up your heads, O you gates; lift them up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. [10] Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty – he is the King of glory.

God used a census decree by the Roman government and Joseph's lineage (for both he and Mary were descendants of David), to get Mary to Bethlehem – at just the right time – for the birth of Jesus. To me, this is a testimony to God's great power and wisdom in working out the details necessary to have Jesus – David's heir to the throne – born in Bethlehem.

HYMN #184

HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING (vs 1,3)

Todd Bayne – Son of man

At the beginning of His life the wise men affirmed that Jesus was a king, for we read in **Matthew 2:1-2 (#2)**, "After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, [2] **Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?** For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him."

At the end of His life, Pilate asked Jesus if He was a king, and Jesus responded in the affirmative. We read this in **JOHN 18:37 (#2)**, Pilate therefore said to Jesus, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. **For this I have been born**, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

HYMN

REJOICE THE LORD IS KING

Paul affirms Christ as king in **I Timothy 1:17 (#3)**, Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

HYMN (#3)

WE WILL GLORIFY

Because Jesus is our savior, we give Him gratitude and love. Because He is our King, we give Him reverence, loyalty, humble obedience, and faithful service. Paul speaks about this in his first letter to Timothy.

I Timothy 6:13-16 (#3)

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, [14] that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, [15] which He will bring about at the proper time – He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, [16] who alone

possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

HYMN

JOY TO THE WORLD (vs 1,3)

BETHLEHEM SPEAKS OF CHRIST AS THE BREAD OF LIFE:

The word Bethlehem, in Hebrew, means “house of bread.” And in this case, the unique connection between Bethlehem and Jesus is that the One who is the **Bread of Life** was born in the **House of Bread**. God’s Messiah was born in the House of Bread and became God’s life-giving manna for all mankind.

Jesus speaks about this in **JOHN 6:26-33 (#4)**, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. [27] Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." [28] Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" [29] Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." [30] So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? [31] Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" [32] Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. [33] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

We do not have Jesus with us in the same way the disciples did, but we have His life-giving bread in the form of the Word of God – which is living and active. Therefore, we read in **1 Peter 2:2 (#4)**, Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.

HYMN

THY WORD

How does eating the Bread of Life help us grow and become spiritually healthy? Let me point out just two ways. **First**, the Bread of Life is living and active, and when we read it, study it, memorize it, and ponder it, we implant its life-changing truths within us. And when the Bread of Life is implanted within us and we use its presence to guide the way we live, it transforms our thinking, our beliefs, our values, our attitudes, and our words and deeds – which enables us to grow as a believer and become spiritually healthy.

Paul speaks of the living word dwelling within and having its intended effects on us in **Galatians 2:20 (#5)**, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

The **second** way the Bread of Life teaches, trains, and transforms us into spiritually healthy Christians is by speaking to us the truths we need for daily living. And though knowing, memorizing, and pondering the living word is vital to spiritual health, it is of no value until we apply the truth we know to how we think, speak, and behave. The reality is, knowing without **living accordingly** is to be what James calls a hearer who deludes himself (**James 1:22**), whereas knowing and **living accordingly** brings us into a state of spiritual health which than brings us into the abundant life in the here and now.

Jesus put it this way in **Matthew 7:24-27 (#5)**, “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. [26] Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

Jesus declares the importance of getting the living word into your innermost being – that is, your mind and heart. We read this in **John 6:35, 51a (#5)**, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.” [51a] “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”

To summarize: Jesus is the **bread of life**. The word of God is also the **bread of life** in written form – made alive and empowered to perform its intended purposes by the Holy Spirit. If we have repented and put our faith in Jesus – who is our **bread of life**, then He will dwell within us. And if we will read, study, meditate on, and live according to the written **bread of life**, then we will experience the purpose of taking in the bread of life – which is to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus.

Deanna Maike: True Vine

Returning to **Galatians 2:20** we read, “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.”

Notice what precedes Christ living in and through Paul – Paul’s own crucifixion. Therefore, like Paul, it is as we die to our old sinful nature, our fleshly desires, and our irrational fears that Christ is free to live in and through us. This **death before life** principle is God’s chosen way of dealing with sin and transforming sinners. For example, Christ died so we could have life through Him. And we must die – with Christ – so He can live His life in and through us.

In other words, we must die to our selfish selves – our self-rule, our ungodly fears, and our pride in order for Christ to effectively, meaningfully, and noticeably live in and through us. Just as a seed that is planted in the ground must die before it can bring forth new life, so we must die before the new nature Christ has planted in us, can bring forth its life within us and from us.

Returning to **John 6:51 (#6)**, Jesus said, “I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever.”

In referring to Himself as the “living bread that came down out of heaven,” Jesus was likening Himself to the manna God provided for Israel in the wilderness. As you recall, Israel needed miraculous provisions of food and water while they traveled through the wilderness on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. God provided both.

In relation to food, God supernaturally provided manna. But He only gave them enough for each day. Why? To show them they needed Him each and every day, and to teach them to confidently trust in Him to be their daily provider in both the physical and spiritual realm.

In this same way, Jesus is our bread – our provision in relation to living the Christian life. And though He only gives us enough to meet the need of the moment or the day, He does it this way for the same reason He did this with Israel – to show us our daily need of Him, and to nurture a confident trust in Him as our provider of everything we need to live a life pleasing to Him.

WHAT AM I WITHOUT YOU – by Twila Paris (#6)

You are the love of all my life, You are the living spring.
You are the joy that finds my heart, Giver of all good things.
What am I without You?

You are the day that rules the night, You are the hope in me.
All that I have descends from You, all I could ever be.
What am I without You?

What am I but a piece of earth breathing holy breath,
What am I but a wayward child given life for certain death.

You are the everlasting Lord, You are the risen King.
That You would come and fill my soul, this is beyond a dream.
What am I without You?

Gary Maike: Author/Finisher of our faith

HYMN

BE UNTO YOUR NAME

Child of Promise – by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson

Who are you little baby? Who are you little Christ-child, lying so quietly in manger straw? Who are you that angels should herald your presence and stars announce your birth? That wise men and shepherds – the high and the low – should bow before you? Who are you, child of Bethlehem, son of David? What is your future? What is your promise?

Seven centuries before your birth the ancient Scriptures speak of you....

For to us a child is born,
To us a son is given,
And the government will be on his shoulders,
And his name will be called
Wonderful Counselor,
Mighty God
Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end.

What is this government? What is this peace, O Christmas baby? Are you a warrior-to-be? Are you a king? What promise do you hold?

How can you be the Mighty God while flecks of straw, blown from the stable floor, dot your fine hair? How is this?

How can you be the Everlasting Father while not yet an hour old? How is it?

How can you be a Wonderful Counselor before you've learned? A teacher before you've been taught? What is the wellspring of your wisdom?

What is this mystery set before us, puzzling newborn lying in a stable manger, born of parents poor, yet destined for this greatness? You must be the One we've hoped for, longed for all our lives. The One who will set us free from our depressions and oppressions, within and without.

Little wonder angels cannot contain their Good News of Great Joy. Little wonder heavenly host sing in chorus,
 Glory to God in the highest,
 and on earth peace to men....

Be my peace, O Prince of Peace. Let its gentle, joyful blanket comfort my nervous soul, and still the warring of your earth.

Be my government, O Christ. Govern not my own heart only, but also this desperate world in which I live.

Be my Everlasting Father and my Counselor. By your counsel guide me out of confusion and turmoil into the sunlight that always shines above my low-lying clouds.

Welcome, Christ-child. All my life I have needed you. O Child of Promise, I want You to be my All-in-all.

HYMN

THOU DIDST LEAVE THY THRONE (vs 1,4,5)

ANNOUNCEMENTS