

**In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ and may our Lord and Savior sanctify you in the truth; for His word is truth. Amen**

**Christmas Eve (2021)**

**Thy Kingdom Come**

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***“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).” (Matthew 1:23, ESV)***

Luther, in explaining the meaning of the Second Petition to the Lord’s Prayer, *Thy Kingdom Come*, tells us, “*The kingdom of God certainly comes by itself without our prayer, but we pray in this petition that it may come to us also.*” It is to this first explanation of the Second Petition that we turn our attention this evening.

What better time to think of God’s kingdom coming to us than at the celebration of the birth of His only begotten Son, who was born of a virgin, a young woman, a human creature, so that He might take upon Himself our flesh and come among us. Not just come among us as God, but to come among us as one of us, to come as true God and true man. God’s kingdom bursting into the silence of the night in a little, obscure Judean village known as Bethlehem. Who would have thought such was possible?

When we think of God we usually think of nobility, might, and splendor. We think of someone whose appearance is so much more superior to our own that we dare not look at Him. But the Incarnate Son of God, is born in a small, dingy stable, gazed upon by farm animals. His bed is a stable full of hay and his clothing is simple, unadorned, swaddling clothes. He is brought into this world as a baby who can be picked up by mere mortals and cuddled to His earthly mother’s breast that He may gain strength and sustenance by which to grow into manhood.

Yes, on a cold winter’s night God’s Kingdom came into the world in the form of a human child. See how God overthrows our expectation that His arrival would be so much more splendid, an entrance of grand magnitude. But, no, He chose the lowliest of means and He announced it to ordinary laymen rather than princes, kings, and high priests. Thus, we are overwhelmed with His ordinariness, His simplicity. But not all was ordinary. Yes, God’s Kingdom came among us with little fanfare by those He chose to visit; however, there were some who were not only blessed to witness this miracle but rejoiced exceedingly when it happened.

God’s Kingdom came into this world heralded by angels. One of them appeared to shepherds who were watching their flocks in the hills around Bethlehem. His appearance frightened them, but He said, ***“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”*** (Luke 2:10–12, ESV) No more had this angel made the announcement of God’s Kingdom coming into the world through the birth of His only begotten Son when suddenly a multitude of angels appeared in the heavens, bursting forth with shouts of acclamation, saying, ***“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”*** (Luke 2:13–14, ESV)

We are not certain how long the angels sang their chorus in the night sky over Bethlehem, Scripture does not tell us. But we do know that as soon as they have completed their aria and returned to heaven, the shepherds knew that had to go and see this great thing of which the angels had sang. Therefore they said, ***“Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.” (Luke 2:15–17, ESV)***

Suddenly the obscure, little, stable where our Lord, the baby Jesus, lay became the center of attention. The shepherds of the night to whom the angels had sang are now filling the stable, marveling at the sight of this little, newborn babe of whom the angels had said was ***“Christ the Lord.”*** There is little doubt this title had great meaning to these shepherds for Scripture tells us they ***“returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.” (Luke 2:20, ESV)***

Quietly God’s Kingdom came into the world, but the manner and magnitude of His arrival is a mystery to be received only through faith. The virgin Mary had conceived the Son of God and the Son of man without sin. She brought forth the Son of God who is born without sin. This baby lying in a manger who is Immanuel, God with us, is the perfect image of God, that image by which the first man, Adam, was created. But unlike the first Adam, our Lord Jesus lived without having sinned; yet He paid the penalty for our sin taking our sin upon Himself to carry them to the Altar of the Cross where He would be the perfect sacrifice for our forgiveness. St. Paul reminds us, ***“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21, ESV)*** The birth we celebrate this evening is of a child who was born so that He could die in our place, taking on Himself the penalty of God’s wrath that we all deserve.

All of what I have spoken must be received through faith, our common, natural senses cannot comprehend this miracle of the birth of the Son of God, of His coming to us through this child born to Mary. Thus, to believe in this child, to believe in His sacrificial death upon the Altar of the Cross brings about another explanation of the second petition, Thy Kingdom Come. God’s Kingdom of grace comes to us through the Holy Spirit, who, by God’s grace, gives us faith to believe in God’s holy Word that we may lead godly lives here and in eternity.

At His Baptism, God said of Jesus, ***“This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” (Matthew 3:17, ESV)*** Then shortly after His baptism our Lord Jesus said, ***“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14–15, ESV)*** In those blessed waters our Lord Jesus was sealed by the Father as the Holy Spirit descended on Him and from that moment on our Lord, who alone had the words of eternal life, called people to faith, calling them into the Kingdom of God’s grace, the Kingdom into which He was born, the Kingdom that comes to us today through God’s gracious gift of faith.

So yes, the Kingdom of God has come into the world, it has come near you, but not because you prayed for it, but because God promised He would come. He promised that through the seed of the woman, He would send a Savior to rescue all men from the sin, death, and the devil. God has fulfilled His promise in the birth of His beloved Son in the small, obscure city of David. Tonight we pray, *Thy Kingdom Come* and know that He is here among us. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.