

WHO IS THIS KING OF GLORY? Celebrating Christ the King Sunday

Who is this King of glory? That's what Psalm 24 asks. The answer my children give when we read this Psalm together is, of course, "Jesus!" And when did Jesus become king? The right answer to this question is, "At his resurrection and ascension" (Heb 10.12, Rev 3.21, Mt 28.18). When Christ ascended into heaven, he officially acceded to his eternal throne (Eph 2.6-7, Col 3.1). That's why on *Ascension Sunday* (which is six weeks after Easter Sunday) we celebrate the *inauguration* of Christ's kingship over all of creation.

But today is *Christ the King Sunday*, the last Sunday of our church year, and on this Sunday we anticipate and celebrate the *consummation* of Christ's kingship over all of creation. Today we eagerly long for Christ's second and final coming, when King Jesus will put all things to rights.

Christ the King Sunday is a recent (20th-century) addition to the ecclesiastical calendar, but it's a worthy addition, not least because it provides a definite end to our church year. Without Christ the King Sunday, our church year would just sort of fizzle out, with no culmination. But Christ's reign in history is not going to fizzle out! Jesus reigns with purpose, with the goal of baptizing and teaching all the nations (Matt 28.19-20), of making a "footstool" of the nations (Psa 110.1, Acts 7.49, Heb 1.13), of uniting heaven and earth (Matt 6.10, Rev 21-22). History is moving toward a climax: the new heavens and new earth (Rom 8.18ff, Rev 21-22) and the defeat of the final foe, death (1 Cor 15.26)! And so our church year, which is a liturgical and typological microcosm of cosmic history, ought to have a climax. It is good and right to dedicate the last Lord's Day of the church year to celebrating and anticipating this "main event" in world history.

Celebrating Christ the King Sunday also takes some of the workload off of Advent. Before we had Christ the King Sunday, Advent was forced to wear two hats, to do double duty. Traditionally, because of the Church's intuitive need to recognize the end of history liturgically, Advent has been seen as both the beginning of a new year and (sort of) the ending of the previous year, bringing together Christ's first and second comings. And to be sure, Advent is a time to celebrate and reflect on all of Christ's comings – his first coming, his final coming, his weekly comings every Lord's Day, his coming in AD 70 to vindicate his Bride vis-à-vis apostate Israel – but Christ's first coming naturally takes center stage during the Advent season, which culminates in Christmas. Christ the King Sunday, then, accomplishes at least two things: It gives focused attention to *the* climactic event in the history of Christ's kingdom (something Advent neither can nor should be forced to do adequately), and it brings the church year to an unambiguous and fulfilling end.

Christ the King Sunday is really a celebratory anticipation of the promise in 1 Corinthians 15.24: "Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power." At the last day, the King will have put all of his enemies underneath his feet (15.25), including death itself (15.26)! And then this King of glory will hand over his glorified kingdom to God the Father (15.24).

Who is this King of glory? The Lord Jesus Christ, strong and mighty! The Lord Jesus Christ, mighty in battle! (Psa 24.8). Praise be to Christ the King!