

Christmas Eve, 2022

Luke 2

He was born in the right place and was born to the right family, but he wasn't what people expected; in fact, he wasn't what many people wanted at all. The child's name was Bertie. Short for Albert. He was shy, suffered from a stutter, was bullied by his father and overshadowed by his brother. He was the spare. A King always needs an heir and a spare. This King already had an heir, Bertie's older brother, and that made Bertie the spare. Even the people of Britain hoped that Bertie would continue to be the spare and not the heir. He just didn't seem to be kingly material.

When their father died, Bertie's brother assumed the throne of the British empire. And Bertie just kept being Bertie. Until his brother, the new king, wanted to marry a woman twice divorced, and doing so meant that he had to give up the throne. Which is exactly what he did. Left the throne for a woman named Wallis. That meant that Bertie was now the next in line to become King of Britain. The spare would now become the heir.

In the late 1930s, the world was again on the brink of war. Rumors spread across the country that the government would bypass Bertie and make the youngest brother the next king. Because, well, Bertie wasn't what they were looking for. But in 1936, stuttering, shy, Bertie assumed the throne and was crowned King George VI. He was not what many expected of a king.

When someone fails to meet your expectations, it's easy to dismiss them. To pass them over and look for another. If you had been in Bethlehem that first Christmas night, what would you have thought as you looked at the baby lying in a manger. The people of Israel had been waiting for generations for the Messiah, the one God would set apart to save the world from sin. God promised that the Messiah would fix the problems of this world that have plagued it since mankind fell into sin in the Garden of Eden. He would defeat the enemies of God's people and usher in a new age of glory.

God told his people, just wait. I am sending someone to fix it all. He will be a descendent of your great King David, but he will be a greater king than you can ever imagine. Israel had high expectations of this king who would be like God's people waited generation after generation, until the night when an army of angels lit up the Judean sky with heaven's glory and proclaimed the arrival of the Messiah, the descendant of David who would sit on David's throne and right everything that was wrong. Go to Bethlehem and see! He was born in the right place, in Bethlehem, David's hometown. He came from the right person, the Virgin Mary, who stood at the end of David's royal line. But when the shepherds got there, you could have excused them if they had been mildly...disappointed.

They were told to go and see the Messiah long promised. And they came and found a baby, watched over by a poor mother and stepfather, lying in the feeding trough for cows. He didn't look all that powerful lying there. After all, his family didn't even have a guest room. When people looked at Jesus, he might not have met their expectations. Sometimes, looks can be deceiving. You see that when the all-powerful God was born, he made himself a human... So that he could die. This baby was going to grow up into a man who looked no more special than the infant in the manger. Until the one day when everything changed. That little baby, that ordinary man, did something that only God could do. He took the punishment for the sins of this world. There on the cross, God kept his promises. His death meant life for you and me. He died so that you and I won't have to die eternally.

He didn't look like much. But if you base your opinion on whether someone meets your expectations, you run the risk of missing out on the truly special. The first hint of that for the people of Britain came in 1939 with the beginning of the Second World War. King George VI gave a radio address to the Empire announcing that Britain had entered the war. He had worked long and hard to control his stutter. In that radio address, you didn't hear the stutter. But you could hear his passion for Britain. They needed to fight for everything they held dear.

Suddenly, people began to see that King George was exactly the wartime king that Britain needed. Even when his staff suggested that he move to Canada for safety, he refused. He stayed in London for the whole war. He was there when London was bombed. He and his family shared in the rationing of food and water. King George was seen helping people to pick up the pieces of rubble. It's not about how he looked or how he sounded, but what he did. George VI joined them in their burdens, he stood with them in the rubble.

In Bethlehem, what the shepherds saw in the manger might not have been what the world expected, but he was exactly what we needed—a king, who would stand with his people. **Today in the town of David, a savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord.** With those words God laid out his plan to fix the brokenness of this world. He wouldn't do it from the throne of heaven. This would not be done from a distance. He would do it by joining us in the ruin and wreckage.

The Son of God was born as a human so he could live among us, share our sorrows, stand in our shoes, and die our death. He would come to save us from our sins, save us from ourselves, save us for something better. He descended into our darkness to become one of us, so that he might pull us up from it. We have a king who joined us in the rubble and the ruin of this world, and endured it all, so that in the end, you might have real, lasting peace. In Jesus we have peace in knowing that our sins are forgiven. This broken world has once again been made whole in Jesus. That's the peace God promises each of us. God fixed what we could not fix.

King George may not have been the King that they first expected. But he was exactly the King Britain needed – a King who stood with his people. The child of Bethlehem failed to meet the expectations of many in Israel. But that child in Bethlehem was exactly the King this world needed. He stood with his people. He was born to save us. Through his death and resurrection, he lifts us up and gives us peace. Amen.