



Monday January 5, 2021

Prepared for you by

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Psalm 72:1-7,10-14

¹Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to the king's son;

²that he may rule your people righteously and the poor with justice;

³that the mountains may bring prosperity to the people, and the hills, in righteousness.

⁴Let him defend the needy among the people, rescue the poor, and crush the oppressor.

⁵May he live as long as the sun and moon endure, from one generation to another.

⁶Let him come down like rain upon the mown field, like showers that water the earth.

⁷In his time may the righteous flourish; and

let there be an abundance of peace till the moon shall be no more.

¹⁰May the kings of Tarshish and of the isles pay tribute, and the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts.

¹¹May all kings bow down before him, and all the nations do him service.

¹²For the king delivers the poor who cry out in distress, the oppressed, and those who have no helper.

¹³He has compassion on the lowly and poor, and preserves the lives of the needy.

¹⁴From oppression and violence he redeems their lives, and precious is their blood in his sight.

As we celebrate Epiphany this week, and the arrival of the three kings to the Christ-child, Psalm 72 seems particularly appropriate. The gifts of the kings, of gold and frankincense and myrrh, are all expensive and kingly gifts, more wealth than Joseph or Mary would have ever seen before in their lives. Our gospel this week concerns the reaction of Herod at the arrival of these foreign dignitaries, and his fury at a possible challenge to his authority in Palestine. Herod is a king who bullied and murdered his way into the good graces of the Romans, who propped him up in exchange for his continued cooperation with the wider empire – there is no way Herod can tolerate another claimant to the tetrarchy, so he has no compunctions about murdering infants.

Here in Psalm 72, however, we are given a different picture of kingship, of wielding authority. A royal psalm, Psalm 72 may have been written for the occasion of a king's coronation, the ascension of the king of Judah to the throne of Jerusalem. Importantly, the king described here is nothing like Herod, who thinks nothing of injustice and spends lives endlessly in his greed and rage. Instead, the king is marked by his respect for the poor and the oppressed, and the tributes of other nations pale in comparison to the respect he holds for the weak and disenfranchised. No historical king of Judah, and no human leader then or now, has done these things the way they ought to be done, has lived up to the demands of this royal psalm. This does not mean we do not push our leaders to stand up for the poor, and the weak, and those who are brutalized by the system. Rather, because we serve the true king, Jesus of Nazareth who was the Word made flesh, we ourselves are under the demands of Psalm 72; as members of the royal household of heaven, we are required to defend the weak, and uplift the poor, and protect all people. Thanks be to God, and Happy New Year!