

# Christ the King

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Matthew presents Jesus as the messianic Davidic king in his opening genealogy but allows his significance and meaning to unfold gradually. At his birth, the Magi recognised him as king (Mt 2:2), while Herod feared him as a political threat (Mt 2:3). The crowds misunderstood him because he was not the kind of king they expected, and even his disciples struggled to grasp him. Yet through his teaching, healing miracles, authority over creation and especially through his self-giving death, Matthew reveals a kingship utterly unlike that of the world.

The world's paradigms for rule, the exercise of power and authority, are built on competition, advantage and strategic timing. James' and John's request for the two most important positions in Jesus' kingdom reveal how deeply even disciples can be shaped by them (Mt 20:20–28). The incident occurred while Jesus and his disciples were journeying to Jerusalem for the last time and where the disciples expected him to set up his kingdom. Three times on the way Jesus predicted his suffering and death, but they failed to hear him (Mt 16:21; 17:22–23; 20:17–19). Perhaps their expectations of a political kingdom and Jesus' recent promise that they would sit on 12 thrones to judge Israel (Mt 19:28–30) filled them with

political ambition.

The timing of the brothers' approach was no accident. Shortly before Peter had been named the rock on which Jesus would build his Church, but almost immediately he stumbled by rejecting Jesus' first prediction of his suffering and death, earning him a sharp rebuke. Jesus called him 'Satan' and 'a stumbling stone' (Mt 16:13–23). Had Peter's stumble created an opening?

James and John approached Jesus with their mother. She took the lead, stepped forward, knelt before him and made her request. It was the kind of respectful approach people used when asking a favour from a person of high standing. She asked that her sons be granted the positions at his right and left hand – positions of honour, power and influence (v. 21). This was no innocent request. It was a timely, calculated manoeuvre to take advantage of Peter's stumble. The other disciples, seeing their own ambitions threatened, were understandably angry with the brothers.

This episode should make us uncomfortable. The ways of the world were alive and well in the hearts of the disciples. They imagined political life in Jesus' kingdom would work similarly to the way it worked in their world – a structure to exploit, a system in which someone else's



*The Journey of the Three Kings (1852) by Leopold Kupelwieser*

failure becomes an opportunity to rise. Scripture consistently condemns advantaging oneself at the expense of others, and Jesus would have none of it.

He called the disciples together for what was more than a teaching moment. It was a kingship moment. Jesus didn't rebuke the brothers' desire for greatness. Instead, he redefined greatness in terms of service. Rather than dominating and lording it over others, the truly great in his kingdom will be the servants and slaves of all (Mt 20:25–27). He offered himself as the definitive paradigm: 'The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (v. 28).

This is the heart of Christ the King. We celebrate and follow a king

whose nature is self-giving love. He secured his throne by a cross rather than by force and by so doing conquered death for all his people. Today in love he continues to secure his people because 'he entered heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf' (Heb 9:24), where 'he ever lives to make intercession for [us]' (Heb 7:25). Christ the King is not the triumph of worldly power. It is the triumph of divine love and humility.

We live in a world where power is often grasped, protected and weaponised. It is misused in homes, communities, workplaces and nations. Christ the King challenges us to exercise power differently by following him in the self-giving love that defines his kingdom.