

Series: ID: King of Kings

November 29, 2015

Title: The Hidden King

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Text: Matthew 1-2

The King's Riddle

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Speaking truth to power has always been a risky proposition. Say too little and you have said nothing at all. Say too much and you could lose your head! No wonder, then, that people from prophets to jesters have found creative ways to make their point.

The prophet Isaiah was sent out by God on just such a mission. The LORD told him to go for a walk with his son and meet King Ahaz by an aqueduct that supplied Jerusalem with water. He was to challenge the king to not be afraid of a coming invasion, but to stand firm in his faith in the LORD.

So how would the king know that these instructions were valid? Isaiah challenged Ahaz to ask the LORD for a sign, "whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights." (Isaiah 7:11). But Ahaz wasn't the least bit interested in trusting the LORD. He replied with hypocritical piety that he wouldn't test God.

Isaiah responded with a riddle:

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Isaiah 7:14 NIV

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

God would come in His power and judgment to rule among His people. How? When? Unpack the riddle!

The riddle returns:

Fast forward some 700 years: The would-be king of the Jews is Herod the Great. He rules with an iron hand. But he is no "son of David." Try as he might to fill the role, the promise can never be his.

The ancient riddle remains unsolved:

"A virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."

But then strange and mysterious things begin happening – right under Herod's royal nose. A heavenly messenger encounters a young woman named Mary – a virgin. He tells her that she will conceive and give birth to a son. The son will be the long awaited King, a true Son of David.

Questions, questions! "A virgin will conceive...?" The angel explains that this will be the work of God's Holy Spirit overshadowing her. The riddle is beginning to yield its secret.

And what about the young woman's fiancé Joseph? Will he be an unbelieving Ahaz or will he help solve the king's riddle?

A King you have to find for yourself:

The power of a riddle is that we have to find the answer for ourselves. The solution to the puzzle is right there in front of us all along. The riddle, in one sense, tells us all we need to know. But in order to solve the riddle, we have to see things in a new way. We have to think outside the box.

Isaiah's riddle of a royal child is a riddle about the coming of God's King. It is a riddle about what it means for God to rule. And ironically, instead of speaking "truth to power," it turns out to God's way of having Power speak Truth to the meek and the lowly!

Isaiah's riddle is a puzzle about a King you have to find for yourself.

Three Secrets

Joseph's Secret:

The ancient riddle had three parts: A **Birth**, a **Son**, and a **Name**. In order to solve the riddle you would have to figure out all three. And that becomes Joseph's assignment. Mary's assignment will be to bear the child. Joseph's assignment will be to solve the riddle.

When we first meet Joseph, he is stuck trying to figure out what to do with that first part of the riddle.

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Matthew 1:18-19 NIV

This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

To Joseph, Mary's pregnancy seemed to have only one explanation – and it wasn't good. The best he could come up with was to keep her moral failure a secret and walk away.

But then an angel spoke to him in a dream, giving him the answer to the first part of the puzzle:

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Matthew 1:20-21 NIV

But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

The great God of Heaven had come to once and for all solve His king's riddle:

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Matthew 1:22-23 NIV

All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

The Magi's Secret:

A Birth, a Son, a Name.

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The challenge of solving the *second* part of the riddle was given to professional riddle-solvers from far away. Matthew tells us that *magi*, or pagan astrologers, had seen their own riddle in the sky. It pointed to the birth of the King of the Jews, and they had come to honor and worship Him.

The second part of Isaiah's riddle had said that the virgin would bear a son. That *son* would be a descendant, or son, of King David. No other lineage would do. Now, the magi came looking for the Son of David who had recently been born.

Their quest brought them to the capital city of Jerusalem. And when they asked to see the baby King, they reignited the old riddle. Could it possibly be that the long-awaited Son of David had already been born?

Herod, already planning to eliminate any competition to his throne, asked *where* the prophets said the King would be born. The answer: Bethlehem. Herod sent them on to Bethlehem with instructions to tell him where they found the child.

The riddle in the sky that had brought them to Jerusalem led them faithfully to the baby Jesus. And so the second part of Isaiah's puzzle was solved. They had found the Son of David.

Their discovery became *the magi's secret*. God spoke to them in a dream to not go back to Herod, so they took another way home.

Egypt's Secret:

We all know what happened next. The angel of the LORD came a third time in a dream, warning Joseph to take Mary and the child to Egypt. They would stay in Egypt until Herod was dead.

Herod ordered that all of the male children of Bethlehem, 2 years old and under, be put to death. Like the pharaoh in Exodus, he attempted to stamp out any chance that God's King would one day rule in his realm. But he was too late. The King of the ancient riddle was already on His way to Egypt. And it would be from Egypt that He would begin a New Exodus for the New People of God. As Matthew explains:

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Matthew 2:15b NIV

And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

First there was Joseph's secret – the secret of a virgin conceiving. Then there was the magi's secret – the secret of the birth of the Son of David. Now, Egypt kept the secret of the King's Name: Immanuel.

Israel's Exodus journey brought them face to face with the LORD. It was there in the desert that He came and formed a covenant with them so that He could dwell with them. God with us. And now, in the very flesh and blood of this little child He was doing so again.

God with us.

Riddle solved.

The Hidden King

Birth:

Isaiah spoke his riddle to a king who needed a miracle. The angel spoke the same riddle to a young man who needed to know how to move forward with his life and his marriage.

So what about you? What impossibility are you facing today? Where do you need God to give you direction for the way forward? Could it be that this ancient riddle still works today?

The promise that "a virgin shall conceive" meant that God was going to break into this old, broken, death-ruled world and *create new life where there was none*. Jesus' miraculous birth was nothing less than the advent of a newly created human race.

Birth. What needs birthing in your life today? It starts with letting God assure you that He isn't finished with you yet! He is creating something brand new.

Son:

Isaiah's riddle promised that God would again *rule* in this world through His king. Jesus' first announcement was simple and to the point:

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Mark 1:15 NIV

"The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"

"The time has come!" God's King is here! The new birth means a new world governed by the One Who created it.

Of course, that was precisely the problem for corrupt kings like Ahaz and Herod. They *didn't* want to share the throne with God.

What about you?

Name:

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When God births new life and rules in our lives, then the last – and most important – part of the riddle comes true: God With Us.

Birth: The Book of Exodus begins with God delivering Israel from Pharaoh.

Son: It continues with Israel becoming God's Son.

But the climax of the story comes when God moves into the sanctuary that Israel has obediently built for Him: God With Us.

He promises to do the same for you. No matter what challenges you face; no matter how confusing the path before you; no matter how long the journey. He will be there every step of the way: God With Us.

But only if you unpack that ancient riddle.