

Christ Community Covenant Church  
Sightings! Melchizedek, the King of Hope  
Pastor Dave Scherrer - December 6, 2015

Merry Christmas! I want to start with a brief message from our artist:

*"This poem and art piece came out of being witness to a story of deep loss. As I have wrestled with my own grief, time and time again I see how God takes my tears and allows them to be like rain that nourishes a thirsty earth. It is out of storms and tears that new things can grow.*

*Out of great loss, if we hold onto the bigger Love Story, then God gives us a new perspective. Hope does rise. God is good. Even though we are all on this earth in the human struggle, we do have hope that God's story ends in love.*

*Even if circumstances do not change, perspectives can. Joy and Love are always available. This advent season reminds us that God came, met us in our humanity, to show how much he is WITH US. In our pain, he is here. Through the care of others, His love spreads.*

*What would it look like to have a perspective of awe, like that of a child, and anticipate good to rise out of sorrow? What would it look like to Trust a bigger Love Story that is bringing healing for the whole world and making things new?"*

It is Christmas and it is a time of wonder and gift giving and beautiful lights and inspiring music. But I agree with Katie. It can also be a time of questions. Our Advent word for this week is hope. The question that might come to mind is, "What does it mean to have hope in broken times?" These are indeed broken times. A terrible shooting a week ago in Colorado Springs killed three including from the sound of it a wonderful policeman and pastor Garrett Swazey. Then just a few days ago the terrible shooting in San Bernardino, California. And of course there is the tragedy of Paris from just a few weeks ago. And there is loss and brokenness for us here in this room and for those we love. Broken dreams, broken hearts. Where is the Christmas hope when we need it?

We are starting a new series for Christmas – we are calling it *Sightings*. For this Christmas season we will be dealing with the idea that theologians call a *Theophany* or a *Christophany*. And right now you are wondering perhaps what exactly is a Christophany?

### **What in the world is a Christophany??? Maybe Christmas was not His first visit!**

Basically it is the idea that Jesus, God's Son – the second person of the Trinity has been to earth before to visit. These Old Testament visits are usually called theophanies and sightings of Jesus after his death and resurrection are called Christophany. The Greek word that have to do with an appearance or manifestation is *Phany* – which you would recognize from the word *epiphany* from the sudden appearance of an idea or awareness. So if there was a *Theo-Phany* or a *Christo-Phany* – that would constitute the sudden but clear appearance of God or of Christ. The idea of course is that perhaps the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem all those so many years ago maybe was not God's first visit!

Disclaimer: The entire idea of a theophany is speculation on the part of scholars and theologians. We can't go too far in this subject before we need to be careful about our doctrine.

For today we are going to look at an Old Testament sighting. There are several to choose from. You remember God meeting Moses at the burning bush or on the top of Mt. Sinai when Moses received the Ten Commandments. Jacob wrestling with the angel some believe was one of these theophanies. And there was several more but perhaps one of the most mysterious is the account of a mysterious Melchizedek.

Melchizedek the King of Righteousness and Peace

Let's read the story. It may not be very familiar to you and it may not seem like a Christmas story but let's get started with it and then I'll try to connect some dots for us.

**Genesis 14:17-20**

After his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him at the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).<sup>18</sup> And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. (He was priest of God Most High.)<sup>19</sup> And he blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;<sup>20</sup> and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

We are going to come back to this little story in a moment but there is a New Testament reference to this same mysterious Priest-King who seemingly comes from nowhere to bless the chosen Patriarch of the Nation of God's chosen people:

**Hebrews 7: 1-3**

For this Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him,<sup>2</sup> and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace.<sup>3</sup> He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever.

I think one of the wonders of Christmas is the idea of God visiting us, becoming human flesh to live with us and to show us God. He came as a friend of sinners, a friend of the outcast and the left out. I think sometimes we get the impression that Jesus kinda started on December 25<sup>th</sup> year zero. But that is bad theology isn't it? This Jesus is the ever existent Christ, the second of the Triune Godhead - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**The Ever-Existent Christ – The Wonder of the Triune Godhead**

We looked at this reality of the ever existent Jesus this past summer in our study of Colossians:

**Colossians 1:15-17**

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.<sup>16</sup> For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.<sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Then in John we read . . .

**John 1:1-4**

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.<sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.<sup>3</sup> All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.<sup>4</sup> In him was life, and the life was the light of men.

I have to say that we are not here today to get into a long discussion regarding the difficult concept of the Trinity. I admit that the Trinity is a difficult concept . . .

"Bring me a worm that can comprehend a man, and then I will show you a man that can comprehend the Triune God." ~ *John Wesley*

But what this means to us is that Jesus has been attending to us all along. His love for us, His attention to us didn't start just two thousand years ago. In a way you can say that it never *'started' because it never didn't exist*. You were in His mind so it is not so great a leap to imagine that for the purposes of the Father, Jesus has perhaps taken form and visited this earth before. So let's look again at this curious story of Melchizedek:

### **The Curious Melchizedek – The King of Righteousness and Peace**

His name is really a title - the King of Righteousness. That is what Melchizedek which means; *melek* means 'king' and *tsedeq* means 'righteousness'. We know that as Christians only Jesus can make us right with God. The Bible says that we can possess the righteousness of Christ, because "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

And Melchizedek is also the "King of Salem." The word Salem is anglicized from the Jewish word Shalom or Peace and most likely from the city/state area of Jeru-salem. And we know that only Jesus is the Prince of Peace.

We also read that not only is this mysterious person a King but he is also a priest. In the account it says as Priest he brought out bread and wine and blessed Abram. Soon we too will celebrate the table of bread and wine as introduced to us by our great High Priest Jesus Christ. And the High Priest was the only one who could go into the Holy of Holies of the temple to make atonement for the sins of the people of God. The comparisons are kinda spiritual crazy eerie unless of course it is because God meant us to understand about His loving presence since ***before the beginning!***

Then we read in the Hebrews passage from earlier:

"He is without father or mother or genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest forever." (Heb. 7:3)

Of course Jesus had a mom, Mary, and a step-dad Joseph. And in the gospel account of Jesus' life in Matthew, we can read his earthly genealogy. And we read of His death on the cross. So this is not like Melchizedek. But in another non-earthly and temporal way, as we were talking earlier, Jesus as the second person of the Triune Godhead is also without a father or mother and has neither a beginning of days nor an end of life. The two offices that only Jesus holds are King of Kings and the Eternal High Priest. Melchizedek held these same titles. How can that be unless . . .

And finally we read at the end of verse 20 in Genesis 14

And Abram gave him a tenth of everything." (vs 20c)

Who else is worth of worship and of receiving a tithe offering except God Himself?

### **So what . . . and what does that have to do with Christmas?**

"Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all... As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength." ~ GK Chesterton

I spoke earlier of our deep need for hope as we make our way through life in a broken world. Now cutting-edge psychological research, spearheaded by **Anthony Sciolli, Ph.D.**, a professor of psychology at Keene State College in New Hampshire, shows that hope is a skill you can acquire. It is active — you can cultivate and nourish it. It is multifaceted — there are 14 distinct aspects, according to Sciolli. It is self-perpetuating — hopeful people tend to be more resilient, more trusting, more open, and more motivated

than those less hopeful, so they are likely to receive more from the world, which in turn makes them more hopeful. His new theory captures the complexity of hope with its roots in the "deeper" self, its foundation in relationships, and its spiritual core. The kind of hope Scioli is concerned with is not about small wishes but big dreams. Hope sustains our intimate bonds, gives life purpose and meaning, and determines our prospects for survival and health. Scioli *states, hope has a strong spiritual dimension*. It is associated with virtues such as patience, gratitude, charity, and faith. "Faith is the building block of hope," he says. But he also said that what is critical is that the object of your faith had to be worthy or it would ultimately fail you as well. Interesting words coming from a psychologist!

What we know is that Christ is the King of Hope and putting our faith in Jesus is our only eternal hope. The story of Melchizedek reminds us that we have never not had a king of Hope. We have never not had an advocate before the Father. The ever eternal Jesus, come in the flesh, has always been our friend.

**The King of Hope – We have never not had an Advocate!**

**He is our eternal Gift of Hope**

**Communion**

**Benediction**

Rachel Swasey said Friday at the memorial service for her husband Garrett killed in the Planned Parenthood shooting two weeks ago in Colorado Springs, "The love of my life gave his life without regret, to be sure that others would live." Rachel Swasey says her husband left his legacy to the world in two words: Elijah and Faith, the names of their son and daughter.

## **Discussion Questions**

Have you ever heard of the term christophany or theophany? What do you think of the idea that Christ may have come for other brief visits? Does that take away from Christmas for you?

Dave talked about the Triune headship and the idea of an ever existing Jesus. Do you think of Jesus this way or that he kinda 'started' at Christmas? Are both these concepts kind of true? How so?

Dave spoke of the offices of Christ as both King and Priest. Which of these images do you identify with more and how so?

Do you take hope in that there has always been an advocate for you?

Where is your hope this Christmas season? What in your life do you need the attribute hope for? (Pray about those things right now!)