

Eve of the Nativity of Our Lord  
St. Matthew 1:18-25

In the name of Jesus. Amen.

History is filled with young kings and queens, some of whom were even crowned as infants.

Tutankhamun—affectionately known today as King Tut—was a boy king. He became Pharaoh at eight or nine years of age and ruled until his death at the young age of 18.

Mary Stuart was six days old when she assumed the throne of her father, James V, to become Mary I of Scotland. You might know her better as Mary, Queen of Scots. Regents ruled Scotland in her stead while she was young and lived in France. Interestingly, her father was 17 months old when he became king, and her son was 13 months old when he became king. Ruling young seems to run in the Stuart family.

Henry VI became king of England when he was eight months old. On top of that, he became king of France when he was 10 months old. His reign over France didn't last long, though, as Joan of Arc was a force in taking the country back from England.

Ivan VI became Tsar of Russian at two months old. His rule lasted all of a year before he was deposed and kept in solitary confinement in one fortress after another for over 20 years. When he was 23, he was murdered by one of his prison guards.

John I became king of France on the day he was born! He died five days later, though. It is thought that his regent, Philip, who was also his uncle, poisoned him. It was Philip who assumed the throne on the death of John.

Not to be outdone, according to legend, Shapur II became Shah of the Sassanid Empire (think modern-day Iran) while still in utero! The legend states that Persian nobles put a crown on the belly of King Hormizd's widow, and so was the first (and only, as far as I know), coronation of a fetal king. How they knew he was a he is beyond me, so I wonder if they would have called him something other than Shah had he been born a girl or if the coronation would have been declared illegitimate. I'm sure you could work some pro-life argument into this legend, too. Nevertheless, Shapur II is considered a successful ruler, having done so for 70 years!

More recently, Oyo was crowned king of the Toro Kingdom in Uganda. That happened 24 years ago, and he was three years old at the time. At 27, he still rules the Toro Kingdom, though his reign is more as a cultural icon than an actual head of state.

So, it's not unusual that a child would be made king or queen. Such a monarch was surrounded by regents who would perform the duties of the king or queen in his or her name until such a time that the monarch was old enough to assume those duties him- or herself. Their age and vulnerability would also have made them easy targets of those who sought to usurp the throne, such as (possibly) in the case of John I of France. History is filled with young kings and queens, some of whom were even crowned as infants.

That said, there is only one case in history where a King became an infant. In all of those cases where an infant became a king, it was done so in order to rule and reign, either as the puppet of another or to preserve the dynastic line. There really is no other reason to crown an infant. But, in the case of the King who became an infant, that was done in order to save.

The angel said to Joseph,

"Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel" (which means, God with us).

The Son of God left His throne in heaven and took on the flesh of His creation. He was conceived in a virgin's womb and born. Wrapped in swaddling cloths, nestled in the arms of Mary was the King of the Universe. Joseph would do as the angel commanded him; eight days after He was born, this Infant gets a foretaste of another coronation that He would undergo as He is circumcised and given the name Jesus, "[F]or he will save his people from their sins."

Mind you, dear hearers, that this is no simple or ordinary abdication, though. In fact, this is no abdication at all. When you hear that Jesus left His throne in heaven, even as you might sing in some Christmas songs, an abdication is not at all what is meant. What is meant is what St. Paul described in his letter to the Philippians: "Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:6-8)

And so you have that wonderful hymn, found in Lutheran Service Book, number 539—Christ is the World's Redeemer. The third stanza in very brief fashion describes the work that Jesus did from His crucifixion on: "Down through the realm of darkness / He strode in victory, / And at the hour appointed / He rose triumphantly / And now, to heav'n ascended, / He sits upon the throne / *Whence He had ne'er departed, / His Father's and His own.*" (emphasis mine) From there, He lives and reigns to all eternity; His kingdom is everlasting—very much unlike the reign of any and all of those infants who became monarch.

It is well that He didn't leave His throne in the sense that He abdicated it. Had that been the case, then He wouldn't have been the fulfillment of the prophecy, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel." Immanuel—"God with us"—would be a lie. When a king abdicates his throne, he is no longer king; if the Son of God would have abdicated His throne to become Man, He would no longer be God, so He would not have been "God with us."

Were He not "God with us," then He wouldn't be your Redeemer. Only God can redeem you from your sin. Only man can shed his blood as propitiation. Only "God with us" could do both! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is your Propitiation, for He took on flesh and blood like yours in order to shed that blood on the cross and give that flesh over to death in order to save you from death; He is, therefore, your Redeemer, who bought you back from death to life with His own precious, holy blood the price.

But the Son of God did leave His throne, in the sense that St. Paul wrote. He did not come as Infant in order to rule with a mighty arm. The rod of iron is in His hand for those who reject Him, as the Psalmist wrote. (cf. Psalm 2:9) But this King sets aside His throne to come in grace and with favor for man, to serve man with Salvation, and to do so by way of His death, resurrection, and ascension.

Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased! (Luke 2:10-11, 14)

He now rules from that throne as your most gracious King, ordering all things for your benefit, edification, and salvation.

And this King has regents, too. This is not in the sense of the regents of those infant kings, but in the sense that He has given authority to certain men on earth to forgive sins in His stead, proclaim salvation on His order, and distribute His treasure, His recompense, His reward, the great mysteries of the Sacraments, as He has directed. These regents, then, are stewards of the promises of God, pastors as you know it.

Therefore, in the stead and by the command of the King who became Infant, I joyfully proclaim to you that the Son of God is your Redeemer. The infant in Mary's arms, Jesus is your Salvation. He is your Propitiation. He has come for you, and so you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.