

SESSION 1

PRESIDENTS AND KINGS

Session Objectives

This session will equip participants to:

- Discuss their understanding of what it means to call Jesus *King*.
- Reflect on how Jesus's birth, life, death, and resurrection led Jesus's followers to believe him the fulfillment of messianic hope.
- Identify a specific "sphere of influence" in which they can witness to Jesus's rule this Advent season.

Biblical Foundation

- Luke 1:26-38

Leader Preparation

- Carefully read *Incarnation*, chapter 1, as well as this session's Biblical Foundation, noting any topics you want or need to investigate further before the session. Consult trusted Bible dictionaries, concordances, and other resources as desired.
- Preview session 1 video segment; make sure your video sharing setup is working.
- Prepare a link to [Luke 1:26-38](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A26-38&version=CEB) to share in chat:
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1%3A26-38&version=CEB>
Alternatively, put the Scripture on a slide to share with participants.
- Optional: Search YouTube or other websites for footage of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation in 1953 and choose a brief clip to share with participants.
- Prepare a slide of the prayer at the end of *Incarnation*, chapter 1; the prayer at the end of this session; or a prayer of your own.

Starting Your Session

Welcome each participant by name as each enters the virtual meeting. Share your enthusiasm for your group's study and ask volunteers to talk briefly about what they hope to gain from it.

Use an icebreaker quiz to set the stage for session 1: Ask participants to identify which presidential candidates (not all of whom won their elections) used the campaign slogans listed below. (Bonus points for identifying the year!)

To run your quiz, first mute all participants, then do one of the following:

- Read each slogan aloud and ask participants to “buzz in” by clicking their “raise hand” option. (Be sure participants are unmuted when they answer.)
- Read the slogans aloud one at a time and have participants send answers to you after each in private, direct chat messages. Announce who correctly identified each slogan before continuing to the next.
- Share your screen, showing a slide listing all the slogans. Allow participants two minutes to write down their answers. Announce the correct responses and have participants score themselves.

- ◇ It’s Morning Again in America (Ronald Reagan, 1984)
- ◇ Vote as You Shot (Ulysses S. Grant, 1868)¹
- ◇ Country First (John McCain, 2008)
- ◇ Yes, We Can (Barack Obama, 2008)
- ◇ He Kept Us Out of War (Woodrow Wilson, 1916)
- ◇ Happy Days Are Here Again (Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1932)
- ◇ In Your Heart, You Know He’s Right (Barry Goldwater, 1964)
- ◇ Not Just Peanuts (Jimmy Carter, 1976)

Read aloud from *Incarnation*:

“This season [of Advent] puts into perspective all our political wrangling; whatever Christians think about their president, and whoever we voted for in the various elections, we are meant to know that there is only one King. It is to him we give our highest allegiance.” (page 17)

Tell participants this session will help your group explore both what Jesus’s first followers meant when they called him “King” and how, if at all, calling Jesus “King” can help us grow in faith and obedience today.

Pray this prayer or one of your own:

God Most High, who rules over all, you claim and call us all, despite our differences and disagreements, to be your Son’s followers. May your Spirit so fill our minds and hearts in this time together that we understand and embody more fully what it means to praise the King of kings and Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹ <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/22920/10-memorable-presidential-campaign-slogans>. Accessed August 25, 2020.

Video Viewing

Screen-share Adam Hamilton's session 1 video segment. After the video, turn off screen sharing and invite comments and questions. You might prompt discussion by asking:

- What words, images, and emotions do you associate with royalty?
- Whom do our twenty-first-century culture and society consider royalty (literally or figuratively), and why?
- How often and how easily do you think of Jesus as royalty? Why?

Messianic Hope

Optional: Screen-share the video you chose earlier of Queen Elizabeth II's coronation. Read Adam Hamilton's description of her anointing (of which no footage exists) from *Incarnation*, page 21.

Ask participants to name some (other) ceremonies or rituals, in the church and/or the larger society, in which people are identified or "set aside" for a special function or purpose. (Responses might include such examples as a presidential inauguration, a medical student's white coat ceremony, or the ordination and installation of ministers and other church leaders.)

Tell participants that anointing with oil was such a ceremony in ancient Israel, especially for its kings. Explain that "Christ" is a title deriving from the Greek translation of the Hebrew "Messiah" and shares the same meaning, "Anointed One." According to Hamilton, "in its most common usage, [the word] was another way of saying, 'king.'" Tell your group Israel remembered David, who first ruled the united tribes of Israel, as its ideal king.

Ask:

- What leaders, if any, from your congregation or community's past do you remember during difficult times? How do these memories sustain and motivate you?
- What dangers, if any, arise when communities idealize leaders from the past?

Put in chat the link you have prepared to Luke 1:26-38. Ask participants to click it or copy and paste it into a new browser tab. Once all are looking at the same Scripture, recruit volunteers to read it aloud taking the "roles" of Mary, Gabriel, and the narrator.

After the reading, ask:

- How do Gabriel's words about Jesus echo ancient Israel's messianic hope? How do you imagine Mary, a devout Jew, felt about the angel's words?

- Based on what you know of Jesus’s ministry, why did Jesus’s followers come to believe he fulfilled these hopes?
- Hamilton describes Jesus’s public ministry as “his campaign for the office of King.” How helpful do you find this metaphor for Jesus’s work, and why?
- What incidents from Jesus’s life can you think of that show how his idea of being a king differed from those the kings and rulers of his day held? How do they differ from the ideas those in positions of power today hold?
- How did Jesus’s resurrection on Easter validate his status as King for his followers?
- Hamilton cites Revelation 19:11-16 as one vision of Jesus’s “triumphant return” as King, when his rule will break the hold sin, evil, and death have over the world fully and finally. (*Leader: Ask a volunteer to locate and read this passage aloud*). What does Revelation’s imagery make you think and feel about Jesus’s kingship? How consistent do you think Revelation’s vision of Jesus as King is with his life and ministry? Why?
- Hamilton writes,

“[T]hough we live in that time between triumphs, the triumph of the Resurrection and that of the Second Coming, the first gives us confidence in the second.” (page 39)

How confident do you feel this Advent season in Jesus’s ultimate triumph as *King*? Why?

Closing Your Session

Hamilton writes,

“I don’t believe it is an overstatement to say that [Jesus] is the single most influential person to have walked this planet.” (page 39)

Read this quotation aloud, then ask:

- Do you agree with Hamilton’s statement? Why or why not?
- How important, if at all, do you think it is for modern Christians to continue calling Jesus “King”? Why?
- What other titles or images, if any, would help people today understand Jesus in the way the title *king* does?

Read aloud from *Incarnation*:

“I don’t know your politics, but if you are a Christian, I know your King. His Sermon on the Mount, his parables, and his great commandments calling us to love God and neighbor represent the laws of his kingdom. Our allegiance to him comes above all other allegiances.” (pages 41–42)

Invite participants to write down a specific place or relationship in which they do or could witness to Jesus's rule, and one specific way they could do so this Advent season. Consider asking volunteers to talk briefly about their responses (be prepared to do so yourself).

Screen-share the prayer slide you prepared so participants can together pray either the prayer at the end of *Incarnation*, chapter 1, the prayer below, or one of your own.

Eternal God, through the ages your people have longed for a righteous ruler who will speed the day your will is finally done on earth as in heaven. In Jesus, your Anointed One, you anointed us to do your will as citizens of your kingdom. By your Spirit, keep us strong and hopeful as his faithful and obedient subjects. Amen.

Optional Extension

Challenge participants to brainstorm all the lyrics from Advent and Christmas hymns and carols they can that feature royal titles and images for Jesus. In addition to or instead of the closing prayer above, close your session by screen-sharing audio and/or video of one of these songs.

Breakout Room Option

Send participants into three virtual breakout rooms, assigning one of these Scriptures to each room:

- Isaiah 9:2-7
- Jeremiah 23:1-8
- Ezekiel 34:23-31

Ask each group to read the assigned passage and discuss how it contributes to an understanding of ancient Israel's messianic hope. When participants return to the main room, ask a volunteer from each breakout room to share highlights of her or his group's discussion.