Sermon: **Above him were written these words: “This is the King of the Jews”** (Luke 23.38)

Seems odd to have a reading from the end of Jesus’ earthly life as we approach the celebration of its beginning. But as in many funerals, sometimes a life is understood best at its end.

Not going to talk about the pain of the Cross or its meaning, but about Jesus’ kingship.

Romans took over Israel through Pompey in 64/63 BCE, and ruled via puppets until 4 BCE when Herod the Great died. As part of Roman Empire Jews had to endure taxation and military occupation, though received relative peace and stability. However the idea of revolt and restoration of kings was near the surface.

The Sanhedrin collaborated (tolerated) this rule and knew a revolt would cause a loss of the limited home-rule. That is why the charge against Jesus was one of kingship. TEXT. But what they mocked, was reality!

There is a lot of talk about how the Jews were all expecting a Messiah – probably exaggerated – but generally perceived in terms of restoration of full home-rule, and thus with military/political force. But Jesus saw kingship in different terms.

Two symbols help us understand this.

[1] The Manger

Above the manger was the star which to the magi said, “This is the king of the Jews”.

What kind of king does it show? Humility. Identifying with the lowest, the disadvantaged.

Jesus showed that in his life – eating with outcasts, speaking to crowds of ordinary folk.

[2] The Cross

What kind of king does it show? Sacrifice for the sake of the beloved.

Jesus showed this in his life – washing disciples’ feet, numerous healings.

Would that our rulers showed more humility, more identity with ordinary people, more sacrifice, more love. We too in places where we ‘rule’ are called to show these qualities – ones of the Kingdom of God.