

AD TE LEVAVI (ADVENT 1)

“To You, I lift up my soul”

December 3 2016

Jeremiah 23:5-8

Romans 13:11-14

Matthew 21:1-9

Standing...

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

When it comes to a new Church Year, we do not begin with Christmas.

We begin with Advent—where we recognize that God Himself comes to save.

In His first Advent He came in humility,

and in His second Advent He will come in glory.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

When we consider how the Lord Jesus comes to us...

this is a reversal of how so many normally think—even many Christians!

Normally, it's one's business to get themselves to God—to get to Him!

They think it's their responsibility to climb Jacob's ladder,

their responsibility to build their very own Tower of Babel

and clamber their way into heaven.

The basic tenant of every religion in the world

is that you have to get to heaven by your own efforts.

Against this, Christianity—and even Advent make it clear,

“God Himself comes to save.”

Or put another way,

“Behold, your King comes to you!”

as the prophet Zechariah once declared.

All the prophets spoke like this...

Did you hear how Jeremiah said it? God's promise made to Israel went like this,

"Behold the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will fulfill the gracious promise I made to the house of Israel and to the house of Judah."

God promised that King David's throne would last forever,
that one of David's sons would sit on the throne and rule the world.

But Jeremiah's day looked nothing like days of fulfillment—
they were more like days of misery.

At that time, Israel was suffering under a Babylonian tyrant
by the name of Nebuchadnezzar.

Nebuchadnezzar set up a puppet king by the name of Zedekiah,
who had Jeremiah thrown into prison.

Yet Jeremiah saw through his present suffering to when God would have His day.
To when God would keep His promise to David,
and God would, *"reign as king ..."*

Jeremiah preached about a ***"branch"***—
one that would spring up out of the dry, dead family tree of David.

And as you know, Jesus is the Branch—the Branch of Righteousness—
the one whom Jeremiah spoke about,
who was the hope of God's people.

So when you fast forward to our Gospel lesson—here He is!
Riding into Jerusalem on a magnificent prancing war horse
with the flashing splendor of the spears and swords
of a mighty marching army
who will bring destruction to all Israel's enemies.

Is that what's depicted?

Ah, no—Jesus—the Branch of Righteousness,
prophesied about throughout the entire Old Testament,
rides into Jerusalem on another man's donkey—
a colt that's never been ridden—and He does so all by Himself
in silence,
in righteousness,

and humility.
 And this is where our attention turns
 on this first Sunday of Advent.

It's all such a lowly scene.

But He chooses lowliness.
 He chooses humility.
 It's what He wanted and,
 it's how He wanted to be known.

I mean, consider:

He was humble and lowly when He first arrived in the womb of an unwed virgin,
 and He remained that way. There was the stable where He was born and the manger in
 which He first slept.

Then there was His home in lowly Nazareth in Galilee,
 to the company He kept throughout His ministry.
 Furthermore, He allowed Himself to be tempted by the devil,
 mistreated,
 mocked,
 rejected,
 or sometimes just ignored,
 all the way to His entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday,
 riding on a borrowed donkey and by weeks' end,
 placed in a borrowed tomb.
 It's all. So. Lowly.

If Jesus came in glory, the way the congregation of Israel wanted Him to—
 who could oppose Him?

Recall, when Jesus was being arrested, and the disciples started to fight
 against the soldiers. Jesus told them, *"Put your sword back into its place.
 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me
 more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matthew 23:52-53)

There's that lowliness again...
 for He didn't appeal to His Father,
 and He wasn't rescued by angels.

Gang, Jerusalem wasn't prepared for a lowly King like this.
 Jerusalem was prepared for the opposite—
 for Christ to come on the clouds, with great glory.

They wanted an Advent of the Messiah that would usher in:
 an age of peace,
 an age of safety,
 an age in which the Christ would take the world
 by the scruff of its depraved and perverted neck,
 and get rid of all the lies,
 all the immorality,
 all the violence,
 all the sickness,
 and all the death.
 To do something drastic and dramatic
 about this dumpster fire known as life on earth.

But that's not what they got, is it?

What they didn't know is that they needed His first Advent,
 of Him riding down from the Mount of Olives,
 across the Kidron Valley and up to the gates of Jerusalem on a donkey,
 bringing salvation.
 They didn't need a King who'd destroy Israel's enemies,
 they needed a King who would weep over the city
 and deal with the dumpster fire of their sin.
 Come and shed the blood of others?
 They needed a King to come in lowliness so that men would
 reject Him and thereby allow His blood to be shed to atone
 for their sins.
 What they needed is exactly what they got.
 Salvation earned by the lowly Christ,
 once and for all.

Most rejected Jesus in His lowliness.

This was Judas' conclusion, who eventually said, "I'm out."
 —and Judas wasn't alone—others were repulsed by His lowliness.
 Pilate, in three different languages wrote on a placard which was hung
 above Jesus, "The King of the Jews." This is usually depicted as the Latin
 abbreviation INRI—Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.
 Here's your King—take a good look—your lowly King.
 People rejected Him then—and they do so today.

You know why?

Because Christ still rides into His Zion,
 into His Jerusalem, into His Church,
 doing so on a "lowly donkey,"
 that is, through the humble means of grace.
 Through the preaching and absolving work of pastors,
 through water, bread and wine.
 Preaching is ignored and disbelieved,
 and Baptism and Holy Communion are emptied of their
 saving power and discounted altogether.
 The King—the Righteousness Branch—
 for now, still allows Himself to be mistreated,
 mocked, rejected, and ignored.

However, just like 2,000 years ago,
 the lowly King is recognized by some as the Christ,
 as the Son of the living God,
 as the Righteous Branch,
 because they realize they have no righteousness of their own to offer God,
 no goodness to shield them from His wrath,
 and no uprightness to plead in His divine courtroom of justice...

They realize that God has indeed come to them,
 just as He promised
 and has given them the Righteousness that avails before God.

By them this lowly King is thanked,
 He's praised, and hailed with songs of...
**Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name
 of the LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!**
 To them, He is their King.
 who has called them by name in baptismal waters, and
 feeds them with Himself through bread and wine.

To be sure, we wait for Christ's Advent in glory.
 Where He'll exalt His Church,
 and do away with oppression,
 weakness, weariness, loneliness, guilt, sickness, and dying.

But mark my words: Those who are prepared for that Advent, the one where He comes
 in glory, are the ones who receive Him in His first Advent—as the lowly Christ.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Sitting...