

Matthew 21.1-9

Ad te levavi

28 November 2021

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church, Topeka, Kansas

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Beloved in the Lord: grace be unto you and peace from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Holy cats! If you think the retailers jump the gun on Christmas, what are we to make of the start of Advent?

After all, this is the start of the big lead-up to the big day—to Christmas. To the Nativity of Our Lord. To 25 December.

But today we find ourselves not on the cusp of Christmas. No angels stopping the mouth of the priest Zechariah in the midst of a cloud of incense as he offers the evening sacrifice in the Temple and chuckles in incredulity at the message of the angel: that he and his wife, aged though they are, are to have a child. The forerunner of the Messiah.

No angels coming to a Nazareth Virgin betrothed to a carpenter with the most unexpected news ever: that pious, unmarried Mary is pregnant with a Child. And not with any Child, but with the Child of Isaiah 7:14—Immanuel, God-with-Us. Jesus, whose name means, “YHWH saves,” because He will save His people from their sins.

No magi spying a new star in the Western sky that inexplicably doesn't move, but stays put over Judea, pointing to Him who is the King of the Jews. None of that.

That's what we *might* expect at the start of Advent.

But here the gun has been jumped. Fast-forward 33 years. The first day of the last week of Him whose birth in Bethlehem we'll celebrate in just 27 days. The 10th day of the Jewish month of Nisan, A.D. 33. Four days before the celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem on Thursday evening and the death of the Son of God on Good Friday.

And why?

So that you don't miss the point.

Exodus 12: “The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: ‘This shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.... Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old..., and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.’”

Beloved in the Lord: in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem there's nothing to be seen unless you see the capital-L Lamb of God mounted on the back of a donkey's foal. The selection of this Lamb is not the people's. It's God's. The rescue provided by this Lamb doesn't extend just to the first-born in the all the land whose doors are painted in blood, but to all who receive His blood painted on the doorway of their heart. His rescue extends to all. For He is the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the *world*. His death is not one for one, but one for many. And His deliverance isn't a shuttling from one land to the minor

promise to Abraham—to the land of promise, to Canaan—it's a deliverance to the greater promise of Abraham, to the eternal blessing in the new heavens and new earth.

No wonder, then, this mysterious King who in triumphal parade rides meek and humble. For He's not returning from battle, but going out to join it. He goes forth not as Victor, but future Victim. And He who will be worsted by sin, death, and devil drags no enemy captive. In the great mystery of the ages He who knew no sin is to be made to be sin for us. He who comes to defeat the first Adam's foe will by that foe suffer mortal defeat. And He who is immortal, in whom is life and whose life is the light of the world will in eerie mid-day darkness succumb to death.

Here, at the start of Advent, that's what's to be seen. Here, at that start of Advent, that's whom we welcome, the gift of Mary's womb. Here, at the start of Advent, as we anticipate the form of an Infant we must see the grown Man and understand His beginning from His end.

For surely if we are to be written into the Gospel lesson for today we are not this King who rides in meekness, or the beasts who carry Him, but the crowd. The example laid before us isn't His, or the donkeys'. It's the crowd.

Now look, I want to do away with that old saw that conveniently turns the Palm Sunday crowd into the mob that just in a few days will scream out their blood-curdling, "Crucify! Crucify!" The Holy Scriptures give no such warrant. *That* crowd, that mob, gathered before Pilate on Good Friday were hooligans co-opted by the high priests who had their own reasons to seek Christ's death. Nor is it in any way helpful to posit that this crowd here on Palm Sunday is, yes, sincerely cheering on Jesus, but only because they think He's heading into town to throw off the Romans and restore the kingship to Judah.

No. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The jenny (the mom donkey) and her foal—their owner responded to the disciples who came to fetch them because the Lord had need of them and gave them up. In faith.

The onlooking crowd saw exactly what Zechariah had foretold. In faith. "Behold, your King comes to you, meek, and riding on a donkey." There was no haughtiness of spirit to behold. No Victor pride. No insolence. Only humility and meekness. For this King is a King of grace and mercy. He comes not to be served, but to serve. He comes to defeat sin, death, and devil, to be sure, but not before and without becoming their Victim. He comes to rescue, but not before and without being taken Captive. He comes to rise from the dead and drag Adam and all his descendants with Him to life, but not before and apart from the Cross.

The disciples laid their cloaks on the jenny and her foal, the crowds spread theirs out on the ground, all at great loss to themselves. But in faith that by Baptism they were to be clothed in Christ Himself.

They cut branches from the trees. But in faith in Him who by a tree was to overcome.

And all they while they sang their Hosannas. Save, we pray! Not of themselves. But in faith, and of Him. It was not to the Son of David that they sang their Hosannas, as if to say, "Save us!" But that they sang, "Hosanna to the Son of David." As if to say, "Lord, grant Him success in this thing You are doing! Lord, grant that this Lamb indeed be Your Lamb, who bears the sin of the world. That His death *will* be the propitiation not only for our sins, but for the sins of all. That this Son of David may indeed establish a Kingdom here on earth of grace! A church in which You daily and richly forgive our sins and the sins of all believers."

This is how the first Sunday in Advent “jumps the gun.” It sees the beginning from the end. It measures the coming of the Lord Jesus not by the moment of His birth, but by the moment of His death.

And it preaches to you to do the same.

For just as the Lord Jesus once came in the womb of the Virgin. Just as the Lord Jesus once came into His holy city to be the propitiation for sin. So does He continue to come among His people in Word and Sacrament. He is a “coming God.” When Adam and Eve fell, it was He who came and gave the promise of the woman’s Seed. That was a salvation. When Israel was held in cruel captivity in Egypt, it was He who saw the misery of His people and came to rescue them. That, too, was a salvation. When the flaming fiery furnace burned so hot no one could get near it, it was He who came and stood in the midst of those young men. And He saved them.

He is a coming God. And because He is a coming God He is, as the angel foretold, Immanuel. God-With-Us, as in Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

That means that this coming God, this “God-With-Us,” this Immanuel is in the midst of His people even now. This First Sunday in Advent begs us to look to the end, to read the beginning from the end, to understand His Advent in light of His death. All His Advents. Not only His Advent through the Blessed Virgin. Not only His Advent to Jerusalem. But even His Advent *right now* in Word and Sacrament. As once He came to save, He continues to come to save. His Word is nothing if not a saving Word. By the Baptism today of little August Henry, He is giving him a rescue from sin, death, and devil. And at His Table He gives you as food the very thing that won your redemption, His holy Body and Blood.

And just like picture of the meek, humble, lowly King riding into Jerusalem begs nothing but faith—the faith of the donkey owner, the faith of the disciples, the faith of the crowd—no less does Christ’s coming among you today in His Word and Sacrament beg your faith. The faith of sinners who see their lost condition. The faith of sinners who in Him see their redemption.

Receive Him in faith. And you will be saved. Amen.

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