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## The First Sunday in Advent

December 3, 2023

**Come, Lord Jesus!**  
**His coming brings salvation**

The season of Advent begins today. Derived from the Latin word, "coming," Advent prepares us to celebrate the Savior's birth at Christmas. Advent does more than that, however. The season also reminds us that Jesus comes to us in his Word and sacraments and will come again at the end of time. With the crowds on Palm Sunday, we shout: "Hosanna (save us)! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

**Sermon**  
**Mark 1:1-11**

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>3</sup> If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.' "

They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" <sup>10</sup> "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

### The Advent of Our King Leads Us into A New Church Year

Hmm, did we mess up the readings for today? Aren't we supposed to be talking about the events leading up to Jesus being born, not the events leading up to Jesus being killed? Why are we talking about Palm Sunday like we're kicking off Holy Week when we should be kicking off Christmas?!

No, we didn't mess things up... "Advent" is just a compound Latin word—*ad + venio*—meaning, "A coming to." Advent is a season of reflection on Jesus "coming to." Coming where? And coming in what way? Well, that's the thing about Advent--it's a season where we're meant to have our eyes focused on more places than one. We focus on how he did Advent—coming in veiled glory, how he does Advent in veiled glory, and how he will Advent with all his magnificent glory unveiled. Our text today of King Jesus *Adventing* into Jerusalem is a text that gets us to reflect on all these things, which is why the Church has used it to introduce the new church year for over a thousand years.

#### He DID Advent in veiled glory

Pious Jews came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover every year. This was a special, yet routine thing--so you'd expect the typical M.O. to be to arrive to the city, and then, uhh, well, go in... right? Which is why the first sentence of our text is so interesting: **When they approached Jerusalem, he sent two of his disciples.** Instead of going in, Jesus stops—because this is no routine Passover. He has a precise plan for how this will be the most special Passover of all time. Every detail matters, and that starts with his *Advent* into the city.

It really should be no surprise that the one who guided all of salvation history, the Word incarnate, would so perfectly arrange his ministry, and yet my mind is blown every time I dig into the details of Jesus' actions. Let's rewind just a little bit:

Just about every time Jesus did some sort of spectacular spectacle, what'd he say afterwards? *"Don't tell anyone. Keep this secret."* If he wanted to, Jesus, the Son of David, could've drawn worldwide crowds by now even greater than the crowds of the other son of David, Solomon—and yet he seemed determined throughout his ministry to do the opposite. He keeps things just about as covert as possible as he paces his ministry. But now, he arrives at Jerusalem and stops. Using his divine omniscience, he sends two disciples ahead to get this donkey, because after all this peace and quiet, it's time to drop the Mentos in the 2-liter of Coke.

What is the deal with the donkey? Matthew tells us that Jesus is fulfilling Zechariah 9:9, **See, your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey**. And because of that word *gentle*, you will hear entire sermons built around this idea: *"Look how lowly this king is to ride in on such a lowly animal as a donkey."* And I'm not gonna say that's wrong, because at this point in time donkeys had become considered more lowly animals, but you know what would've been a *really* lowly way for a king to enter a city? Walking in on two feet with dusty, dirty sandals. *That* would be the lowliest way. So, what is the nuance of Jesus choosing to ride a donkey of all things?

Riding into a city on a donkey was not so much a *lowly* thing, but actually a very *royal, kingly* thing to do: Throughout the ancient near east, if kings rode in on majestic white stallions, this suggested they came with conquering strength; but if they rode in on a donkey, this suggested they came in peace. So, when Jews read **See, your king comes to you...riding on a donkey**, they wouldn't have thought, *"Wow, that's an unusual thing for a king to ride."* It was very kingly, it just communicated what kind of a king you were. For Jesus, the Son of David, though, this connected to something even deeper.

When the land of Israel was in a state of turmoil and it was time for the other son of David, Solomon, to take his place on the throne as the new king of Israel, he rides into Jerusalem on... a donkey. And as he rides in, The Bible says in 1 Kings 1 that the people are, **rejoicing with such a great joy that the earth split open from the sound**. And as king, Solomon brings peace to the land and takes the *"kingdom of his father David"* to its greatest heights.

Fast forward to a new Son of David riding into Jerusalem on... a donkey. The people turn it into a make-shift kingly procession, laying down branches and clothing as they're chanting, **Hosanna!** (Which means, *"Save us, Please!"*) **Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!** Sound familiar? They thought they finally had their Messiah—the new Son of David—to bring peace to the land by saving them from the Romans and to bring the *"kingdom of his father David"* to its greatest heights once again.

What are we to make of this people's reaction to the *Advent* of our king? It's difficult to assess, because as soon as Jesus' definition of how the Messiah is to bring peace into the land and establish his kingdom clashes with their expectation of who they want the Messiah to be (another earthly king like David or Solomon) as soon as he's confronting not Romans but self-righteousness... they lose interest. As soon as his glory is more veiled and he's made to look like a pathetic joke of a king—crowned with thorns and enthroned on a bloody cross, they're uninterested. If they're only willing to praise this king when he's exciting, is this true praise at all?

### **He DOES Advent in veiled glory**

As we enter into a new church year that's starts off with a bang in the time of Christmas, it's good to assess our reaction to the *Advent* of our king, as well. It's easy to join the masses when there's all the fanfare and celebration and emotions are high, singing, *"Glory to the newborn king!"* and *"Joy to the world, the Lord is come!"* It's easy to marvel in artful performances of the Hallelujah Chorus talking about how that king *"shall reign forever and ever."* It's easy when your king's big and exciting.

But the reality is that on your typical Sunday, you won't find much fanfare here. You will see the same people, sing many of the same songs, and here largely variations of the same things. It may not feel like anything big and exciting is happening here most of the time.

So, after the “easy” time to praise him, when his glory is more veiled, and the crowds of Christmas scatter...

When we're left with Jesus *Adventing* to us through simple Bible stories, bread, wine, and water...

When he speaks to us in a small midwestern church through the mouthpiece of a young seminary student...

When all the fanfare passes and you're back to the quiet of your home—and you're faced with how this king maybe isn't bringing peace the way you want him to be...

When he doesn't heal what you want healed, or provide what you want provided...

When he's not a king who's content with you having a more relaxed association with him or when he's not a king who's unbothered by the sin that keeps cropping up in our life, but a king who calls for your total dedication...

When you're left with a simple king bleeding out on a cross *merely* to grant you the forgiveness of your sins and gift you life and salvation, is that kind of King enough to hold your attention?

Even faithful Christians will struggle with the temptation that nothing big is happening here as the king continues to *Advent* to us in veiled glory. And yet this is how God constantly chooses to operate, and the veil does not change the fact that the glory shining behind it is radiant. God hides incredible things out in the open if you're just willing to not close your eyes and cover your ears to it—because he *loves* to pull away the veil for his people! This is how God veils his glory:

God veiled his kingly glory when he joined his creation wrapped in flesh like ours, swimming in the amniotic fluid of the womb and all, and then growing up like any old Middle Eastern boy.

He veiled his kingly glory when his royal procession to take the throne instead led to take the cross, where the flesh he took on found its purpose as it was torn to shreds for our sin.

He veiled his kingly glory as his body was placed in the veil of the tomb.

*But behind this veil burst forth resurrection glory declaring righteousness for the very sinful humanity he had joined.* It may not have looked like anything big and exciting was happening as this king was crucified, died, and was buried—but it's in those very veiled places where *miracles happen*, in this case, winning salvation for the world. In the same way, it may not look all that flashy as he continues to *Advent* to us in Word and Sacrament, and yet the reality is that it's in that very veiled place where miracles happen. We see that *miracles happen*. Incredible miracles happen right here within these simple walls hidden away in our hearts as faith is created and strengthened and lives are healed and turned around. You may not always see it, but when you do, with Isaiah you can't help but say, **Yes, you are a God who hides, God of Israel, our Savior** (Is 45:15).

### **He WILL Advent with all glory unveiled**

King Jesus did *Advent* in veiled glory, he does *Advent* in veiled glory, and he will *Advent* again. But when he comes again, he will not be coming **gentle and riding on a donkey**. John wrote in Revelation 19, **Then I saw heaven opened, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True, and with justice he judges and makes war... And he has a name written on his robe and on his thigh: King of Kings and Lord of Lords.** This time he will come with all glory unveiled, riding in on that majestic white stallion he chose not to ride in on before, communicating to the whole world his conquering power as the Kingdom of his father David—the church of God—reaches its greatest heights, spanning the entire New Creation.

Look, emotions and rejoicing and fanfare are by no means bad—they are the natural and appropriate response for something as big and magnificent as the ruling activity of our King. But after the carols decrescendo and the music stops, true praise and fanfare that lasts is fanfare that's rooted not in a theology of glory, but in a theology of the cross centered on the death and resurrection of our King found in his Word.

So, because our King first *Advented* into Jerusalem in peace bringing us salvation as our Savior, when this same King *Advents* into the world in glory as our Conquering Lord, this is something to rejoice in and continually await. When he comes, may we not be found scattered with the Christmas crowds, but standing tall with our heads held high in eager anticipation.

This new Church year until our King *Advents* again: With Isaiah we sing, **“Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down!”** With Paul we cry, **“Praise to our God who keeps us firm till the end that we will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** And with all the Lord’s faithful throughout the history of the one true church we rejoice, **Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! “Hosanna in the highest heaven! Amen.**

*This sermon was preached by Vicar Micah L. Otto.*