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The First Sunday in Advent

When the Lord Comes Near
He Comes to Save

The season of Advent is the four-week period before Christmas that the Church uses to focus on coming of Christ: The first time as a baby, then the on-going coming in Word and sacrament, and finally, his last coming at the end of time. Whenever and wherever Jesus comes, he comes to save us.

Sermon
Luke 19:28-38

[Jesus was on his way] going up to Jerusalem. As he approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.' " Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord needs it." They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Don't Be Fooled by The Donkey

Do you ever wonder why Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey? So you're thinking: No I never wonder why Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. The Bible says he did and that's good enough for me. OK. Fair enough.

Here's another question: Are you wondering why we're talking about Palm Sunday which we all know is the first day of Holy Week—why we're talking about Palm Sunday on the First Sunday in Advent? Something doesn't seem to fit here. Palm Sunday leads us to Easter and Advent us leads to Christmas.

There is a connection; you figured there was. The word Advent means *to come*. In Advent we think about the coming of Jesus, his arrival, his entry into our world. We especially think about Jesus coming as a baby. The four candles in the Advent wreath help us count time to Christmas. But in Advent we also think about Jesus coming again at the end of time. So the blue paraments are the color of the sky and that's where we'll look to see Jesus coming in all his glory. And in the time between Jesus first coming and his last coming Jesus comes to us again and again in his Word and in the sacraments. That's what Jesus is doing today and on the next 51 Sundays of the Christian Church Year which starts today on the First Sunday in Advent. So when the leaders of the church way back when looked for a Gospel reading that described the first coming, the middle coming, and the last coming, Palm Sunday was a natural. Palm Sunday was the day Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey.

Do you ever wonder why Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey? I suppose you figured I'd get back to that question. Here's the usual answer, and certainly the most obvious: Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey to prove that he was humble and lowly. That makes sense, especially to people who know about horses. Cowboys ride horses, not donkeys. Police ride horses, royals ride horses, jockeys ride horses. Nobody goes to the racetrack to bet on donkeys. Donkeys are

pack animals, they're beasts of burden, they put their heads down and carry the loads. Nobody respects a donkey. So Jesus and the donkey seem to fit, right? The humble and lowly Jesus comes to our world and enters our lives riding on a donkey. But...

Don't Be Fooled by the Donkey

Jesus was at the end of a long, hard walk from Jericho to Jerusalem. Jericho was a thousand feet below sea level and Jerusalem was 2,800 feet above sea level, so it was uphill all the way. What was coming would be even harder; Jesus knew he was walking to his death. He arrived at Bethany late Friday afternoon and spent the Sabbath with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. On Sunday morning he led his disciples to the city. They arrived at the crest of the Mount of Olives, between Bethany and the village of Bethphage. They weren't far from Jerusalem now; they would have heard the noises from the city. Jesus could have walked—it wasn't far—but he turned to two of his disciples and said this: **Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.** This wasn't just good luck. Nobody said, "Hey Jesus, here's a donkey. Take a load off your feet and ride." Jesus planned to ride that donkey. Jesus knew where the donkey would be and knew the donkey would be a foal which no one had ridden. So were they supposed to just steal the donkey? No. **If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" say, "The Lord needs it."** So the disciples went to locate the donkey. **They found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?" They replied, "The Lord needs it."** That was that; nobody said a word. They had their donkey. The beast of burden. Lowly and humble.

But there's more here than lowly and humble. Donkeys weren't always lowly and humble and Jesus knew it. King David kept more donkeys in his stables than horses. When King Solomon went to be crowned as David's successor, he rode a donkey. Kings rode horses to make war; kings rode donkeys to bring peace. Jesus rode that donkey into Jerusalem because he wanted Jerusalem to remember that kings riding donkeys were bringers of peace. And there was more. Jesus wanted Jerusalem to remember Zechariah's prophecy: **Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.** Jesus decided to ride that donkey on purpose. He wanted to proclaim to Jerusalem that he was the king God had promised. He wouldn't be a tyrant; he would be **lowly** and gentle, but he would also be **righteous and victorious**. He would destroy the satanic forces of evil just as Zechariah had said he would and the prophet said more: **He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea.** With that donkey Jesus was trumpeting this truth: I am the King who is coming to bring you peace with God. Whether these people followed Jesus or hated him, the people in Jerusalem knew about Solomon and his donkey and they knew about Zechariah and his donkey. They had learned those stories when they were children. With that donkey Jesus said: I am David's greater son; I am Zechariah's promised king. Don't be fooled by the donkey. Look below the surface and see the donkey for what it is: the beast that carried Christ the King.

It's easy to be short-sighted about Jesus, to look only at what's on the surface, to see Jesus only in terms of here and now. People do it all the time; maybe, sometimes, you do too. Christmas becomes not much more than a holiday, a time for presents and parties and family and friends. The same goes for his Second Coming. Judgment Day doesn't seem nearly as threatening as global warming and to some people, global warming is the only thing that's real. The Bible is nothing more to some people than an old book filled with fables. To others, even for some Christians, it's a book for Sundays and no other days. Water creates life with God in babies? Bread and wine become body and blood? Really!? Come on! Today Jesus calls us on to look past the donkey, to see more than lowliness and humility. He urges us to look beyond the manger, to look above the ozone layer, to look inside the Bible, and look beneath the water and bread and wine and see what's really there. When we look thoroughly, when we consider carefully, and believe firmly—when we take Jesus all in—we will see the Savior who is Christ the Lord.

Those crowds on Palm Sunday—did they get it? They saw the donkey for sure. Did they see who the rider really was? Luke reports that they spread their cloaks on the road and created a royal carpet for Jesus. He goes on: **When Jesus came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen.** Had they fallen into the usual trap of praising Jesus only because he could feed and heal soldiers who fought against the Romans? We don't know what they were thinking; we just know what they were shouting: **Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!** Straight from Psalm 118

which every Jew knew looked ahead to the Messiah. With Messiah on their minds, they shouted, **Let there be peace in heaven and glory in the highest.** Luke doesn't mention Hosanna or Blessed is the son of David like the other Gospel writers do. His Gentile readers wouldn't have understood. But these shouts were enough. The crowds on Palm Sunday were convinced; they weren't fooled by the donkey. They knew what the donkey meant. The rider it carried was the one who came to save them.

The world is groaning for peace. A new Corona virus strain comes out of South Africa and the world groans. Murder trials dominate CNN and Fox News and the nation groans. A fanatic sets out on a killing spree and Waukesha groans. Inflation attacks our gas tanks and grocery bills and we all groan. But Jesus didn't come to our world to bring that kind of peace. Jesus came to end the pandemic of sin that infected us all. He came to attack the murderous evil of hell which we all earned. He came to defeat the mayhem and massacres of Satan which we all had coming. He came to deflate the anger of God which we all deserved. He did it the hard way. He undid the disease of sin by living his whole life without sin. He ended the horrors of hell by suffering those horrors in our place. He took on Satan and defeated him. And by his perfect life and innocent death Jesus ended the war between God and human creatures and he brought peace on earth—and he brought that peace to us.

Make sure, brothers and sisters, that you see the rider who rode that donkey on Palm Sunday. He's coming to your life, too. Look below the surface, look past the obvious, and see him for what he really does for you. Because of Jesus you will celebrate Christmas with peace in your heart even if there's no peace in your world or your city or your home. With Jesus you will look forward to the end of time with confidence and eagerness even as the society around you collapses in filth and fear. With Jesus you will open your Bible and find his love, you will remember your baptism and find your forgiveness, you will receive his body and blood and find your strength. What do we say to that? Come, Lord, be our guest, and let your gifts to us be blest. Amen.