

Ad Te Levavi  
29 November, Anno Domini 2020  
St. Matthew 21:1-9  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

I'm not certain, but this is the first year that I've seen Christmas decorations up before Thanksgiving and I bet they don't come down quite as quickly either. It's not surprising. The isolation, the bitter hatred, the shaming, the power struggles, the faceless faces, the relentless news reporting - it's all too much. People are breaking. Many are angry. Many are depressed. People are desperately looking for some reason to hope and something to bring joy. Maybe you are too. And that's exactly what Christmas is supposed to give! "Glory be to God on high and on earth, peace, goodwill toward men!" This is not simply a fleeting, emotional joy that disappears as soon as Bing Crosby and "Jingle Bells" leave the airways. Christmas is the source of hope and joy for all people, the kind that endures past the trees and the lights and the presents and the family get-togethers. The celebration of Jesus' birth is the celebration of our salvation, the celebration of God's faithfulness to His promise, the celebration that God became a man and wrapped Himself in the ugliness and brokenness and weakness and death of our life.

But if we desire that peace that passes all human understanding, we have to be able to see things clearly and understand how all the pieces fit together and toward what end because just another baby doesn't mean a whole lot. That's why we find ourselves standing outside the gates of Jerusalem four weeks before peering with wonder and awe into the manger of Bethlehem. Here, outside the Holy City, all the questions are answered. Here we learn why. Here all the alleluias, all the hymns of praise and thanksgiving, the unrestrained angelic choirs find their meaning and source. And the reason is absolutely marvelous, almost impossible to believe - the Son of God gave His life into death to save sinners. But before the joy, before the choirs of angels, before the shepherds and the wise men, we need to pause. Our flesh needs to be reined in and reminded. Before the brilliant white there needs to be a time of penitential violet or else the white, the joy, the alleluias - all of it will be lost, quickly passed over and cast aside just like the shiny wrapping paper and exciting gifts under the tree.

In the triumphal entry of Jesus the comfort of the manger becomes clear. We see exactly who Jesus is and what He has come to do. We learn of God's character and His faithfulness to His promises of old. Every anxious heart, every troubled conscience, every sinner frightened by the impending reality of death should hear of this King, should see this procession and know without a shadow of a doubt that they have a merciful Lord. You have a Lord who doesn't stare down at you with eyes filled with the fires of judgment or turns away from you unaffected by your suffering and pain. The eyes of the Triune God are filled with the love and compassion of a Father yearning for the safe return of His beloved children who have so long lived under the dark shadow of sin and death. And every proud heart, every deluded thought of self-righteousness, every vain imagination should be brought low in the face of the deep humility and gentleness and self-sacrifice of God's Son.

Make no mistake, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is a victory march. It is the declaration to Satan and his ilk that the time of their judgment has come. Certainly, God has ample reason to march into Jerusalem with the legions of heaven and exact punishment on that city as He did Sodom and Gomorrah. He has just as much cause to visit us all with the eternal condemnation we each deserve for our sedition and rebellion against His rule and His kingdom. He knew that His own people whom He had chosen from among all the nations rejected and hated Him. He knew they would kill Him. He knows the discontent that still brews deeply in your heart. He knows how concerned you are with the opinions of others and how you fear their disfavor. He knows how you have spent your time and energy on what you want instead of what your wife, your children, and your neighbor need. He knows how you have often feared losing your life in this world more than the life He gives, the life He has given you by feeding you the fruits of His sacrifice in the Holy Communion. He knows the excuses, the lies, the worries, and the unbelief.

And so, perhaps, we aren't always thrilled at the idea of God's coming to us because we're afraid. We are afraid that He will come now and deal with us according to our sin. We foolishly believe that the Jesus who rode so humbly into Jerusalem is no longer who Jesus is. We're afraid that when He approaches, if He approaches, His promises will no longer matter, only His anger. It would be best if such a God just stayed far away.

Repent. That isn't why Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary or why He rode into Jerusalem. He didn't come to condemn you. He didn't come to rain down fire and brimstone on your heads. He didn't come to destroy you but to be destroyed by your sin. Jesus didn't come to conquer you. He came to conquer the prince of darkness, the father of lies, the ancient serpent and give you His victory. Jesus rode into Jerusalem as the one who would bring hope to all who are wearied and burdened and tired of how broken and messed up this world is.

And so he doesn't ride in on a magnificent war horse leading a battalion of soldiers in order to occupy the Holy City. Behold, look at this amazing thing! Your king comes to you humble and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden. The peace that you long for, that God wouldn't deal with you as you most certainly deserve but rather mercifully, that you would be safe even in the midst of death, that the evil of this world will finally have its end - that is what Jesus comes to bring to you. In Baptism, He has made Himself your king. He wants you in His kingdom - a kingdom that isn't fractured by political parties or ideologies or men seeking power over others. Yours is a gentle king who stoops down in love to save and to serve you. You do not need to fear His approach. Your Lord draws near to you to serve you, to be Himself the beast of burden who bears your burden, the burden that weighs heavily on your heart and mind, the burden that brings you to the very gates of hell, trembling in terror because of the fear of what you know you deserve. It is certainly no small thing that the Creator of heaven and earth comes in this way - humbly, as a servant of servants, the Lord who comes to lay down His life to save you.

And this is how He would have you look upon Him and receive Him. He comes to you this day just as humbly and for the very same reason - to save you, to buy you back from death, to carry the whole burden of your sin on His own back, to deliver you from fear and bring you peace in this valley of sorrows and for all eternity. He sends His called and ordained ones to loose you from the bonds of your sin and to proclaim Jesus' victory so that now, in Jesus' kingdom, you may humbly serve others in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. You have been set free to now live holy and upright lives, to love even your enemies and political opponents as you have been loved, to freely forgive as you are forgiven, to help, to give, to show mercy. In the waters of Holy Baptism, you have put on the Lord Jesus Christ and cast aside the works of darkness - orgies, drunkenness, sexual immorality, and sensuality. You have put to death the

desires of the flesh. Your old master, who sought only your eternal destruction, has been cast off and now you serve a different master, a Master who has first served you by coming for you in His incarnation, by dying for you, by shedding His precious Blood for you, by preaching His victory to the four corners of the earth, by satisfying your hunger and thirst for the righteousness and peace of God.

Perspective. This is what Advent is all about - gaining the proper perspective on Christmas so that we may know its true and holy joy each and every day. Advent reminds us that Christmas isn't about forgetting the evil of this world but about remembering the Lord Jesus Christ who has come to us in the midst of this world to give us hope. It is about your King who comes to save sinners, who comes gently, humbly, desiring not to frighten you but to comfort you and bring you the peace that only He can give. He comes in the Name of the Lord, the Name of Jesus, "God saves". Blessed is He who has come into our midst this day to save us. Hosanna in the Highest!

In the Name of +Jesus.