

2013\_12\_01 Advent 1 | Sermon  
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
Pastor David Pfeiffer

## **The Coming of Christ Evokes Humble Hosannas**

based on Gospel of the Day

Matthew 21:1–11

INI

**Let us PRAY: Lord come to us in Your Word that we might know how to rightly praise you. Amen.**

*Matthew 21:4–5 All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: “Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.’ ”*

To all who look for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, the grace of God which brings salvation be yours, dear fellow redeemed, (Titus 2:11-13)

I thought we were in the Christmas season. Last week we read the crucifixion account. Today we’re talking about Palm Sunday. What is going on here?

After all, its time to talk about Christmas isn’t it? What are we waiting for? Or still yet, what are we waiting for? As the Christmas season arrives, there is an expectation. Decorations, food, traveling, guests, time off, presents – its a time to give a little and get a little. Two phone calls in the last week said as much. I received two calls in the last week asking if our church participates in any Christmas-present give away during this time of year. There is an expectation; something people are waiting for.

Our expectations have a way of shaping our readiness for the coming of our Lord. Our expectations have a way of impacting our reaction when He arrives. When Jesus comes, does He look strange? Is He a bit out of place? Its like a Palm Sunday in December. Does He fail to give us what we’re looking for?

Consider the person who has recently lost a loved one, who hangs one less stocking on the wall this year. What about the couple who is going through marital problems and has to divide Christmas in half – the kids spend one half with mom, the other with dad. Or what about the person who sits alone in a nursing home on Christmas Eve, who has no one to visit them, nothing to expect.

If all our expectations revolve around giving a little, getting a little, where are we left when these things fall apart. If our expectations are built on decorations, family, guests, food, churches that gather gifts for the poor – when Christ actually comes, do we recognize Him. Or does He look strange.

A Palm Sunday in December?? “Who is this who rides to Jerusalem?”

An answer comes from the crowd. Someone steps forward: “I was there. Yes, I was there on that journey to Jerusalem. It was the Passover. And I was a disciple of Jesus, the Great Prophet, the One we thought could be the Messiah. We expected great things.

“We joined the caravan at Jericho and went along as the crowds followed our Lord up the slopes of the Mountain of Olive Trees. I was just trying to get close enough to hear what He was saying when it happened. Out of the crowd He called for me and my oldest son. He told us to go into a nearby village to retrieve a donkey for Him. And there we found a donkey and its colt, just as He had said. Their owner just handed them over at no cost. It was as if His Word was with us, accomplishing whatever He wanted.

“By the time we returned with the donkey and colt, the crowds had reached the descent toward Jerusalem. As our Lord mounted the donkey, we could gaze out over the Kidron Valley to see in the distance, Jerusalem, the Holy City. And suddenly, someone began chanting a Hebrew psalm. It was one of the Passover psalms. We Jews would sing these processional psalms during pilgrimages such as this:

אָנָּה יְהוָה הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּא

Anah Jehovah, Hosan-na!

בָּרוּךְ הֵבֵא בִשְׁמֵי יְהוָה

Baruch habah bisheim Jehovah!

“That is,

‘O LORD, Let salvation now come!’

‘Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the LORD!’

“Back and forth, these shouts of Hosanna began to overtake the crowds. We were acknowledging the saving presence of the King. Some of us were even calling Him the Son of David! It was a Messianic sight.

People were cutting down branches of trees and laying them in the road. Others were taking off their cloaks and placing them on the path. Our King was approaching Jerusalem. And our hope was moving toward the redemption of Israel. Many of us thought this would finally bring peace to our people. We imagined a homeland free from Roman laws, finances free from the Roman taxes.

We expected His coming to be welcomed with those same joyous shouts when we reached the city. But there was no such response. No song coming from Zion. No welcome. In fact, they didn't even know who He was.

The idea of singing Hosanna to a pilgrim from Nazareth was so out of place. To lay down their cloaks for one who rides on a filthy donkey just did not fit with their expectations. He was strange.

And things went all wrong. The Jewish Religious Council did not buy into Jesus' message. Instead of being crowned King, He was taken prisoner. They thought Him a fake. He was a rebel, they said, bent on turning the people against them. This was not the sort of Christ they expected.

"My own expectations were beginning to crumble. They took my Lord as a prisoner and put Him on trial. I didn't know what to think. This Passover was supposed to be a time of rejoicing. This was supposed to be the time in which we celebrate the coming of the Messiah. A time of joy. But now my Lord taken before the Roman governor on the count of blasphemy. They crucified Him.

"This didn't turn out how at all how I expected. I left the city absolutely distraught. Where was the King we had for which we had laid down our palm branches? I went home. Back to my family. Back to my farming. I went back to the taxes that were overdue, back to a sick wife; my troubles had not gone away. Had I missed something?"

"I had all but given up on my King when someone stopped by. It was Matthew, a apostle of Jesus. Matthew stopped by and everything changed.

"I asked him, 'how could this have happened? Wasn't our Lord's arrival in Jerusalem supposed to bring His glorious kingdom to us?'"

"Yes," he said. "But not in the way that you suppose." He opened up the scroll of Zechariah and pointed to the place where it said:

*Zechariah 9:9–10 “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.*

My expectations had been misled. Matthew explained how this entrance to Jerusalem was the coming of our King – just not in the way people expected. The crucifixion, – however awful – the salvation of God’s kingdom. This was not about the glory of an earthly king; this was about a spiritual kingdom; this was about peace with God.

Suddenly I began to see it all in a new way. I understood more fully what those Hosannas meant that day. I was humbled – for my doubts, my frustration, my quickness to be dissatisfied because things in my life were not changing. And Matthew comforted me with the forgiveness of God.

He asked me to bring out bread and wine. We began to sing Psalm 118 again – with new understanding “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!” Indeed salvation had now come. It was just like when we retrieved the colt. Jesus was with us; His word was accomplishing what God pleased. And Matthew gave me the good news – He is risen. He was alive. He was coming to us even now in this gathering. The sacrifice He made was being given to me, the body and blood of our risen Lord.

Now I knew peace in a way I hadn’t thought of it before. I knew redemption in terms of God’s forgiveness and the hope of my Lord’s final return. All I could do now was to offer humble hosannas.”

And that is why we’re talking about Palm Sunday in December.

Because it is easy to miss out on the coming of Christ. It’s easy to be let down by a Christmas that is nothing more than decorations, food, guests; and miss out on our Lord’s Advent.

This is what the season of Advent is meant to accomplish. It is meant to get us ready for the coming of Christ – both by reflecting on His first coming and anticipating His second. Palm Sunday shows us what to expect in Jesus’ first coming, and how to prepare for His final coming.

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With expectations shaped by Scripture, we begin to know what it means to welcome our King. That person who has lost a loved one, that family divided by divorce, that elder in the nursing home, all alone – these can find reason to worship, to offer their humble hosannas, to welcome their lowly King. Because it is not about the “spirit of Christmas” but the message of Christmas. “For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.” Let us join that procession with new hope and and sing our humble hosannas:

“O LORD, let salvation now come!”

“Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the LORD!”

Amen.