

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

The Hallmark channels started playing their Christmas movies beginning in October. Christmas decorations started going up as soon as Halloween was over; businesses employ a full court press from November 1st to December 25th; it's vital for the bottom line. These days, Black Friday specials begin before Thanksgiving, and Cyber Monday extends all week. Regardless the lists Santa has made, the kids have made their wish lists. They're excited and full of anticipation — groan...Christmas is still 22 days away!

Of course, Christians can't ignore all this hustle and bustle. We have to prepare. There are presents to buy, decorations to put up, meals to plan, travel plans to make. But that's what makes the season of Advent in the church so special—and so important. We are also making preparations for the yearly festival of our Lord's birth, but these preparations are different. Our Advent preparations are not meant to add to the stress and frantic activity of the season, but to provide an escape for a little while. Thus our preparations are a bit more staid. They're a bit more sober. They're a bit more subdued, for even as we move toward the Festival of the Nativity of our Lord, the cross is never far from view.

Nevertheless, our preparations start with a bit of excitement. They begin by welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem with shouts of acclamation and praise. "*Hosanna!*" shouted the people. "*Hosanna in the highest!*"

Hosanna is an exciting word. It's a word of anticipation and expectation. "*Save now!*" it means. The cries of "*Hosanna*" could have come from those who had followed Jesus from Bethany, where Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. "Save us, we pray!" "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" Or they could have come from those who came out from Jerusalem to meet the King who, they thought, would restore David's earthly kingdom and remove the occupying Romans. "*Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!*" Either way, Jesus must be the Messiah! "*Hosanna in the highest!*"

These shouts of hosanna at the beginning of the week portend what would happen at the end, and both groups would be disappointed. Jesus was the promised Messiah, come to bring salvation. Yes, "*daughter of Zion, Behold, your salvation comes*" (Isaiah 62:11) in Jesus.

They were right. Jesus was their king sent to save His people—an eternal king, the son of David sent to rule an everlasting kingdom. But they didn't understand how this rescue must be effected—here's where our reflection turns sober. Jesus entered into Jerusalem, humbly on that donkey's colt, His Divine countenance masked by flesh, not to deliver a salvation from Roman rule, but a salvation from sins that justly anger God, a salvation from your successes and best efforts, which are nothing but polluted garments before God, a salvation from

iniquities that rightly would make you melt in the presence God's holiness and send you away to the ruin of hell, a salvation from the constant and tiring accusations of your imperfections by your enemy, the devil.

Even those looking for a Savior from sin didn't realize that it would take a cross to effect it. Not even His disciples would fully grasp it, and they had been told to expect it. The "*Son of Man [was going] ... to be mocked and flogged and crucified*" (Matthew 20:18-19), they were told. A cross would have to become the earthly throne of this king. Jesus would have to be lifted up on a cross and die to deliver to them—to you—a kingdom not of this world. By Jesus' death, God has "*delivered [you] from the domain of darkness and transferred [you] to the kingdom of his beloved Son*" (Colossians 1:13).

But you know what it took, and you know that this King rose again from the dead to open your way to a heavenly kingdom free from sin and sorrow, trial and tears, to an everlasting kingdom where what was foretold of Him has come to pass, where "*the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and [where] he shall reign forever and ever*" (Revelation 11:15).

Yet, for you, this kingdom has not been fully realized. To be sure, through Holy Baptism, He has welcomed you by water and the Spirit into His kingdom, "*into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord*. But you're not there fully yet—you're still waiting for the day when the Savior will "rend the heavens wide" and "come down with mighty stride" to "unlock the gates," "break down the doors," and "unbar the way to heaven's crown." We're still waiting for Him to "lead us with mighty hand From exile to our promised land" (LSB355).

But in your waiting, He sustains you in your calling to the end, by the word and testimony concerning Christ, and by the grace of His holy Sacrament, "*so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" that you may be found "*guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

He sustains you as you wait with the very same body and blood that rode humbly into Jerusalem on that beast of burden, this time riding humbly into Zion on lowly bread and wine, to deliver to you what He won by cross and death. That's why you add your hosannas to those of the multitude. That's why you sing with them, "*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" Your salvation comes to you today in the body and blood of the Son of David.

God grant that these gifts of baptism, preaching, and supper will sustain you until He comes again in glory, and God grant that these churchly preparations may give you rest, refreshment, and refuge in this busy season, as you prepare for the yearly festival of our Lord's birth.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.