

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Jesus' triumphant entry finds its way into the church's worship a couple times a year. If you think for a bit, you'll remember: "Oh, yeah. We celebrate it on the First Sunday in Advent." And then, also on Palm Sunday. On Palm Sunday, we read about it from John's account; in Advent, from one of the Synoptics, but it's the same account — King Jesus enters into Jerusalem "*sitting on a donkey's colt*" to shouts of acclamation.

How different our attitude, I think, as we ponder this text! Context makes all the difference. As we enter Advent, our minds are turning toward Christmas; we're preparing for the coming of Jesus as the infant King. If we would have recited the introit today, we would have heard, "*Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle*" (Ps. 24:7-8), and the Advent hymn might have come to mind: "Lift up your heads, ye mighty gates! Behold the King of glory waits. The King of kings is drawing near; The Savior of the world is here. ..."

But it is not Advent, and Christmas is not right around the corner. Rather it's Lent, and particularly the start of Holy Week. It's not Christmas we are yearning for, but Easter, preceded by Good Friday. And that makes a difference.

Therefore, today we welcome our King not to Bethlehem but to Jerusalem. We don't have palms in hand today (we would have on Sunday), but we join the crowd and celebrate the coming of our King, for the time had come not for our Savior to break into this fallen world, but for Him to propitiate the Father's wrath for our sin, to justify us sinners by His death and resurrection, to reconcile the world to the Father by placing our sin upon Him and nailing them to the cross, to redeem the world by His blood, forgiving us our sins, to be for the world the spotless Lamb of God that takes away its sins.

Indeed, although the words "savior" or "save" are used of Jesus at His coming — think "*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins*" (Matt. 1:21); think Mary's song, "*my spirit rejoices in God my Savior*" (Luke 1:47), or the angel's proclamation, "*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord*" (Luke 2:11) — these words are not used explicitly of Jesus in this holy week of His passion except in mockery — "*You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross*" (Matt. 27:40). And "*He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him*" (Matt. 27:42).

And yet, truly these words are there in this Palm Sunday text, though probably hidden from most of our eyes. They're there in the shouts of hosanna. "*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!*" For what does this word mean, this word that we sing repeatedly, every time we prepare to meet our King in the holy Sacrament? הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא — hoshia na? It comes from the Hebrew word יָשַׁע — yasha, to save or deliver.

OT commentators Keil and Delitsch have this saying, applied to Jesus, mean "God save the King," as if the that Jewish crowd was a gathering of Englishmen hailing their monarch. But I don't think so. The people are reciting Psalm 118, and I'm no Hebrew expert, but it never gets translated as Keil and Delitsch suggest. Rather, it's a supplication to the Lord, "*Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!*" (Ps. 118:25). I think this crowd at the beginning of the week, unlike the rabble that called for His blood at the end, truly was welcoming Jesus, not only as their King but also as their Savior. For remember, the crowd went out to meet Jesus because he had raised Lazarus from the dead. Surely, He, who could do that, could save them.

And although their hopes may have been dashed as they saw Jesus lifted up on a cross, Jesus would not disappoint them, for He who raised Lazarus, also had the power over sin and death. His death did indeed propitiate and justify and reconcile and redeem. This Lamb sacrificed for us did indeed take away the sins of the world, for this Lamb rose from the dead; this Lamb, though slain, lives, and He reigns even now as our King. And He bestows on His own what He won for us: forgiveness and life and salvation.

Yes, Jesus is our King, but He is also our Savior, which is why we sing our hosannas as we come to partake of the grace He gives by His supper. For here we welcome Him into our midst with His body and blood given and shed for us for the forgiveness of our sins. And how appropriate at this particular moment ... how appropriate in the face of this crisis with all of its uncertainty, with all of our fears, ... how appropriate that we implore God with our hosannas, for this is what we want now. "*Save us, we pray, O LORD. O LORD, we pray, give us success!*" Indeed, "*Hosanna in the highest!*" (Matt. 21:9)

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