

November 29, 2020
First Sunday in Advent
Mark 11:1–10

I.N.I.

Sermon preached by the Rev. Richard A. Lammert at Zion Lutheran Church, Fort Wayne, IN

Theme: “Coming in the name of the Lord”

In the name of ✠ Jesus. **Amen.**

We have just entered the season of Advent, the season during which we prepare to celebrate the coming of our Lord on Christmas Day as a tiny infant, the child of Mary—yet our readings seem to be out of sync with that. The reading from Isaiah 64 *could* apply to Christmas, although it sounds more like a passage we could have read during the last three Sundays of the church year. But certainly our Gospel reading must be wrong.

No, not at all. Our reading about Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem is exactly the reading we *do* need for today. For Jesus’ birth is never separated from the rest of His life and death upon our globe two thousand years ago. If we celebrate Jesus’ birth as a tiny, helpless, adorable infant boy, but never look beyond Christmas, we have missed the entire point of His coming to earth.

Jesus was the first man born upon earth who was born to die. I don’t say this to take away any celebratory joy of Christmas. Indeed, we should rejoice in and enjoy God’s gift to us in the birth of His Son, Jesus Christ. That birth, however, is fully understood and enjoyed when we know *why* Jesus was born.

St. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans, “Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Death came into the world only because of sin. Man was created for life, not death—and we intuitively know that. Yet here we have God who took on human flesh, in order to die.

St. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). To this day, “Jesus Christ and him crucified” is the proper focus of a Christian sermon. That theme remains, of course, somewhat in the background as we prepare for Christmas, but even then it is not invisible. The theme is more prominent, even if not explicit, in our reading about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week. We consider our Gospel text with the theme “Coming in the name of the Lord.”

Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is well known, since we hear the recitation of the event not only on Palm Sunday, but also here, in Advent. Since there are many facets to this event, I will not try to present everything before tying this to the event we are currently preparing for, Christmas.

That a change is coming in Jesus’ ministry can be seen in the manner in which

Jesus entered Jerusalem. Recall that Jesus normally went about on foot from town to town. Similarly, He sent out His disciples two by two, to go to the towns in Israel by foot. This mode of ministry changes as Jesus enters Jerusalem on a donkey.

St. Mark makes no reference, as St. Matthew and St. John do, to the Old Testament passage in Zechariah that underlies Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. That passage is undoubtedly the background for Jesus' actions on Palm Sunday. Zechariah writes, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey" (Zech. 9:9).

Of particular note for us, this was *not* the normal way for royalty to enter a city in triumphal procession. Jesus' entry parallels nothing in the Old Testament (other than this passage in Zechariah), nor in the Greco-Roman culture in which He lived. No one would have mistaken Jesus' entry as the entry of a royal person, coming to claim his throne. Certainly the Roman authorities would not have missed a very public arrival by someone presenting a threat to the Roman authority already in place. Although the Roman authorities were not as opposed to Jesus as the Jewish authorities, they would certainly have taken notice of a king arriving in Jerusalem who would probably be an opponent of Caesar.

The only way to understand Jesus' entry is from the context of Zechariah: that the King of the Jews ("*your* King," O daughter of Zion) is coming to save His people, not to create a renewed earthly kingdom for the Jews, but to bring in the kingdom of God, the kingdom about which Jesus had preached from the beginning of his earthly ministry.

And, clearly, the crowds themselves also understood this. One could well argue whether or not they understood it *correctly*, given the response of the crowds later in Holy Week, but the people on Palm Sunday certainly believed that Jesus was entering the city of Jerusalem for their salvation. They cried out enthusiastically, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" (Mark 11:9).

The first word and the sentence following it is from Psalm 118, verses 25 and 26: "Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD" (Psalm 118:25–26). You probably didn't hear "Hosanna" at the beginning of those verses. That's because "hosanna" [ὡσαννά] is a Greek rendering of "hoshiana" [הוֹשִׁיעָה נָא], Hebrew for "save us, we pray"—which is what we have in the ESV of this verse.

The Greek translation that the Jews would have known has here "O Lord, save, indeed," which is a translation of the Hebrew, just as we have in the ESV. The use of the transliterated Hebrew term for what would have been familiar to them also in translated Greek is a certain indication that the crowds around Jesus knew what they were saying.

We mostly think of that cry of "Hosanna" as being a cry of praise and thanksgiving, a confident cry that God *has* heard the petition to save, and has acted on it. We think that, because that is how the word is used in the New Testament. You can hear the rejoicing in that cry by the crowds in our Gospel text.

We can show the connection between those two aspects of the word scripturally. No good Jew would have been able to utter one line of a Psalm without thinking of the rest of the Psalm. You know and have the same experience when I say “The LORD is my shepherd.” You will automatically think about goodness and mercy following you, or God with you in the valley of the shadow of death, or lying down in green pastures—whatever most addresses your present situation.

So, what would a Jew who cried out “Hosanna” think about? Let’s just back up one verse in Psalm 118: “This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it” (Ps. 118:24). Or, listen to the last two verses of the Psalm: “You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!” (Ps. 118:28–29).

Nestled between those three verses is our plea, “Save us, we pray.” For the faithful Jew looking forward to the time of the Messiah, and for us looking back to the time of Jesus Christ, one can confidently cry out “save us” to God—and know that God is able to save us and *will* save us, as He has promised. And for someone who was looking at the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, it was only natural to see that as the day that the Lord had made, the day that He had prepared for Jesus to begin His final trek to the cross. And the cry of “save us” then becomes a cry of faith and thanksgiving for that salvation.

But I need to come now to what I announced as the theme: “Coming in the name of the Lord.” The crowds around Jesus cried out, “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” quoting from Psalm 118. What does that mean? First, we must note that the *Lord* here is more than our English word *lord* or *master*, which it can mean. Here, *Lord* is God’s name, Yahweh, the name by which God has revealed Himself. Another way to render it is as “the true God,” in distinction to any other “god” who is not the true God.

We know how we use the phrase “in the name of someone.” We mean that the person who is coming “in the name of someone” is not coming of his own accord, with his own authority, but because “that someone” has authorized him to come in his place, with the same authority as “that someone.”

Jesus does not come wielding His own authority; He comes in the name of, with the authority of, Yahweh, the true God. I know that this statement sounds contradictory, since Jesus was Himself God. Doesn’t He have authority Himself, since He is God?

Yes, indeed, certainly, without a doubt. But here are two answers to the question “why didn’t He use that authority?”: First, I am using the same verse that the crowds used, in which the one who comes is ascribed to Jesus, who thereby is coming in the name of the Lord. Scripture uses that phrase, Jesus didn’t deny it, so I will also use it.

Second, during His earthly ministry, Jesus was in the state of humiliation; Jesus humbled Himself; taking on the form of a servant. The state of humiliation was that period of self-denial during which Jesus forbore using and enjoying fully and constantly the divine majesty communicated to His human nature. In other
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words, for our case here, Jesus would not—and did not—play the “God” card just to make a point.

Jesus did not come just because God *the Father* wanted to show what He could do. The crowds have it right: “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” (Mark 11:10). This is not a quotation from Psalm 118; there is a parallel to the statement in Zechariah 9, although certainly not verbatim; and there are numerous parallels in other places in the Old Testament.

The parallel I want to note is with the first words that St. Mark recorded of Jesus, in Mark 1:15: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” “The kingdom of God is at hand.” “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David.” The kingdom of God was indeed at hand, coming, “mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey,” as Zechariah said, and as the people saw with their own eyes.

The kingdom of God, in the person of Jesus Christ, had broken into the lives of these people, bringing—or, better, *being*—salvation. The salvation that God had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the salvation that God had promised to David, was sitting right in front of these people on a donkey. Jesus *was* the salvation promised because He *was* the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

Jesus Christ had come to be the once-for-all-time sacrificial lamb, taking upon Himself the sins of the world, to die for those sins—your sins and mine—on the cross of Calvary, and to rise from death in triumph over death, sin, and the devil.

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David.” God had rent the heavens and come down to His people, bringing with Him a foretaste of that final kingdom which all believers will enjoy the next time God rends the heavens and comes down.

I think Martin Luther expressed quite well the idea of “coming in the name of the Lord” in his hymn “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice.” In stanzas 5 and 6, Luther has us sing: “God said to His beloved Son: / ‘It’s time to have compassion. / Then go, bright jewel of My crown, / And bring to all salvation.’” “The Son obeyed His Father’s will, / . . . / And God’s good pleasure to fulfill, / He came to be my brother” (*LSB* 556:5, 6).

There you have Jesus Christ leaving heaven, at the command of, and by the will of, God the Father. He came to earth “in the name of Yahweh.” Actually, Luther did one better than me—he also included the time of Christmas in his hymn. I left out one line from stanza 6: “The Son obeyed His Father’s will, / Was born of virgin mother; / And God’s good pleasure to fulfill, / He came to be my brother” (*LSB* 556:5, 6).

He who recognizes the threatening perils of his sin, recognizes that Jesus Christ came in the name of the Lord to bear those sins on the cross, and recognizes that Jesus Christ was born of virgin mother in order to be his brother—such a person is well prepared for Christmas.

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**