

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

People get excited about different things. For some, it's their sports team, high school, college, pros. For others, it's going shopping. And for others at this time of the year, it's the energy of the season, the preparations, the hustle and bustle.

This preparatory season hardly needs any stirring up, but that's exactly what we pray for as we enter into Advent. We are not, however, asking God to add more to our busyness as we march toward the Nativity of our Lord. We're praying to God the Father to help us in our devotion to His "only-begotten Son" in the midst of all the activities that tend to push Him aside. "Stir up our hearts, O Lord," we will pray next Sunday "that by His coming we may be enabled to serve You with pure minds" (Collect for Advent 2A).

Today we prayed to Jesus, "Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come." Come and protect us from "the human pride That seeks to thrust Your truth aside Or with some man-made thoughts or things Would dim the words Your Spirit sings" (LSB585:5). For it is by hearing and believing these words that we are "rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by [Jesus'] mighty deliverance" (Collect for Advent 1A).

On the Fourth Sunday in Advent, we will pray again to Jesus, "Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might" (Collect for Advent 4A). Help us by lifting off our backs the load of sin which weighs us down and every self-imposed burden of the season. We "*who labor and are heavy laden*" come to You according to Your promise: "*I will give you rest.*" Give us the easy yoke of Your grace, the light burden of Your mercy (Matt. 11:28-30). This is the stirring up that we need.

The other kind of stirring up, we leave to Jesus, which He is quite successful at doing all on His own. In fact, that's what He does as He enters into the holy city Jerusalem at the start of what we usually call Holy Week ... He shakes things up. Matthew reports: "*when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, 'Who is this?'*" To be sure, some of the people knew who He was. They were stirred up to recognize Jesus as king, "*the Son of David ... he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" And they cried out: "*Hosanna in the highest!*" Others were stirred up enough to call Him "*the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.*"

Jesus stirred things up on this day, as He often did, by doing the unexpected. And even though we have come to expect Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem at the start of Advent, still it stirs us up by its unusual placement at the start of a season devoted to preparation for Jesus' coming as a babe in Bethlehem. It's shocking to juxtapose that tender image with the grotesque suffering endured by Jesus at the end of this week. It stirs us up to think about the unexpected coming of

our king into Jerusalem “*humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.*” Jesus rides into Jerusalem in humble estate without a royal steed, tack, attire, or entourage, yet He is hailed as the Son of David, the Lord, come to save us now — Hosanna in the highest.

Actually, from the first moments of His coming, Jesus stirs things up. An angel appears to a virgin to tell her that she should bear a son; and she is stirred up: “*How will this be, since I am a virgin?*” How exciting! God Himself would take care of this miracle through His Holy Spirit, so that her son would be both Son of God and everlasting king.

Mary travels to meet her cousin, Elizabeth, and Elizabeth becomes stirred up in the presence of the “*mother of [her] Lord,*” and Elizabeth’s baby, too. He is so stirred up that he leaps in his mother womb.

All the heavens are astir at the birth of this son of the Virgin. Though born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling cloths, and laid in a manger, an angel with a good news message and the song of the angelic choir stir the shepherds up and send them scurrying to find this newborn king and worship Him (Luke 2:7-16)

Forty days later, a righteous man “*waiting for the consolation of Israel*” (Luke 2:25), filled with the Holy Spirit, recognizes Jesus as the Christ, and he is stirred up to proclaim that he is ready to depart. His eyes have now seen the Lord’s salvation, “*a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel*” (Luke 2:32).

Wise men from distant lands see the sign of a special star. They are stirred up enough to follow this star to the child Jesus, to worship Him and bring Him gifts (Matt. 2:1-11).

All throughout His ministry, too, Jesus stirred things up — He made the lame to walk; He gave sight to the blind; He cleansed lepers; He restored hearing to the deaf; He raised the dead (Matt. 11:5). He fed the multitudes (Matt. 14:13-21); He calmed the seas (Matt. 8:23-27). And more ... He forgave sins (Matt. 9:2); He claimed to be before Abraham (John 8:58); He gave a bread better than Moses—His own flesh and blood, the bread of life that one might eat and never die (John 6:32-58). He called Himself “*the Christ, the Son of God*” (Matt. 26:63-65). He called Himself “*Lord.*” You heard Him today tell His disciples, “*If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them’ ...*”

Jesus stirred things up by the things He did and by the things He said, for only a few days after Jesus had entered into Jerusalem, a mob that had been stirred up called for His death. “*Crucify him,*” they roared, and Pilate had Him hung from a tree. Our God and Lord, with flesh and blood like yours and mine, was cursed for

us (Gal. 3:13). The innocent one, in whom was found no fault, was condemned for our lawbreaking.

But He wasn't done. On the third day, the earth shook, His grave was opened, and the tomb was empty. Jesus had risen from the dead. The crucified one is alive, and we are stirred up: "Christ is risen! Alleluia!" "He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Alleluia!"

And then, before He departed to the heavens, returning to His Father's right hand, Jesus gave us a gift to stir us from the death of sin to life in Him. He gave us baptism that gives us rebirth into Him (Matt. 28:19). It stirs us to a life of repentance (Matt. 4:17), of denying ourselves and taking up our cross and following Him (Matt. 16:24), calling us to love and good works (Matt. 22:39; Matt. 5:44).

And so, as we enter into Advent and begin a new church year, how appropriate to be stirred up as we prayed ... stirred up greater devotion to our Lord, stirred up to examine our lives in the past year and to repent of our failings, stirred up with hearts that look forward to the coming of our God in the flesh, our Savior from sin, stirred up to a steadfast confession of Jesus as Lord, stirred up in the full assurance of faith in the remembrance of our baptism, stirred up to the faithful reception of God's gifts; and also stirred up to love, to holiness of living, to the support of the work of Christ's kingdom, to good works for our neighbors. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "*let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near*" (Heb. 10:25).

Therefore, as Jesus' coming in humility into Jerusalem stirred up the crowds, so may His humble riding in to us on my faltering words and soon also on lowly bread and wine stir us up to join with the angels and the multitudes of saints before us to cry, "*Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" And by this Sacrament, may He stir up our hearts to greater devotion and love. Yes, we pray: stir us up, O Lord.

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