

+ Matthew 21:1-9 + Do You Know Who's Coming? + 1st Sunday of Advent + 29 November 2015 +

“Do you know who’s coming? Is everything ready? How much more do we still need to prepare?” Chances are pretty good that you’ve probably heard questions like that in the past week or so. Just a week ago we were rushing to make the absolute last preparations for the arrival of almost 100 guests for our Dedication festivities. Over the last week, people all around our communities and all over our country were rushing around to make final preparations for Thanksgiving get-togethers. Perhaps you found yourself getting ready for the guests coming to your home or maybe you were simply getting ready to be a guest at a Thanksgiving get-together.

Now the rush has started to prepare for Christmas parties at work or school or for family get-togethers, all of which include a lot of shopping. Then there might even be a New Year’s party to prepare for in there too. This time of year it seems like everyone is preparing either for the arrival of guests or for being a guest. Get the house cleaned. Get the decorations up. Get the food before, during, and after the meal ready...and the list goes on and on.

Yet with all our preparation for guest lists of every shape and size, have you forgotten Someone? There always seems to be one Guest whom we somehow forget to put on our list of who’s coming to our home. I’m not talking about your third cousin twice-removed. Rather it’s surprising that we forget this Guest, because he has done some pretty unforgettable things. You would expect that preparation for his arrival would take top priority.

Yet all the hustle and bustle of these weeks before Christmas always seem to get in the way. We’re not the first ones to forget about this Guest. Sadly people have been forgetting him for centuries and even failed to see how special of a Guest he was when he lived and worked among people like you and me. Countless people like us have failed to prepare for his Advent.

That word “Advent” is a unique word—one we rarely use in daily conversation. You probably don’t think about the “Advent” of your guests coming to your party or get-together, but you do anticipate their “coming,” which is what Advent means. It’s a special word that the Christian church has used for centuries to remind itself that this special Guest is coming.

In doing so, the Church has gotten ready for his arrival with watching and waiting, repenting and preparing, rejoicing and celebrating, trusting and hoping. For centuries, the Palm Sunday text before us from Matthew 21 has been read on this Sunday—the 1st Sunday of Advent. We don’t read it because Christians can’t tell the difference between the early winter weeks before Christmas and the spring week before Easter, but because this text reminds us who our Guest is and why we prepare for his arrival. See if you can pick up on it as you hear today’s Gospel lesson. **READ MT 21:1-9.**

Did you hear it? Did you hear the subtle Advent melody in the Holy Week symphony that builds up towards Christ’s death on Good Friday and concludes with his resurrection on Easter Sunday? **“See, your king comes to you...”** The King is coming, but you’d never know it from his appearance.

Of all the rides to choose from, of all the mighty steeds surely available in Israel, Jesus chose to ride an unbroken colt. He comes **“gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey...”** Of all the finely tooled saddles in Israel, Jesus sat on the cloaks of his disciples—not much more than a little padding, but then there’s his red carpet or perhaps we should describe it as his earth-toned carpet. **“A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.”** Jesus’ “red” carpet was made out of coats and palm branches lopped off of trees. At first glance, there is nothing all that majestic or royal about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem.

Many in those crowds dreamed that God’s promised King would come to throw off the Roman oppressors and claim the ancient throne of King David, who once ruled Israel. Even some of his own disciples thought that, but what a pathetic image for one who was supposed to destroy the Romans and establish a world empire—a lowly man riding on coats on the back of an unbroken colt.

Yet for a brief moment, many in those crowds recognized Jesus for who he really was. Matthew quotes the prophet Zechariah, who uncovers the true joy behind Jerusalem’s celebration of the arrival of her honored Guest. **“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See your king comes to you righteous and having salvation...”** (Zechariah 9:9) You can hear it in the ancient song of the people, **“Hosanna!”**, which means “Lord, save us!”

The pilgrim crowds rejoiced because God’s long-promised Guest, his royal Savior, the King who was both Son of David and Son of God had finally come. **“Hosanna! Lord, save us!”** Here was the One who was coming in

righteousness, who was bringing salvation. ***“Hosanna! Lord, save us!”*** Here was the Son of David who was coming ***“in the name of the Lord”*** to rescue them from sin and death. ***“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”***

Countless pilgrims took their most expensive, most prized possessions—their cloaks—and placed them on the ground for this Jesus and his nervous colt to walk over. They cut down branches from the palm trees and laid them on the ground. They waved them in the air praising the King who had come in the flesh to bring salvation. Here was their Savior-King! At that moment, they couldn't praise Jesus enough. ***“Hosanna in the highest!”***

“See, your king comes to you...” Who is this King whose coming we celebrate for four weeks before Christmas? Who is this King who will be the focus of our worship not just today, but all year long? Who is this King whose life and ministry and teaching we follow year in and year out? Who is this King who is and will be the hub and hinge of our faith? Do you know who's coming? Psalm 24:(8,10) answers our questions, ***“Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle...Who is he, this King of glory? The LORD Almighty—he is the King of glory.”***

So we hear those ancient words of the prophet Zechariah fulfilled in the advent of King Jesus—the Lord of free and faithful grace—come in the flesh. ***“See, your king comes to you...”*** We recall the watching and waiting of God's Old Testament people and how they patiently watched and waited for the coming of the Messiah—God's Anointed One, the Son of David and Son of God born of a virgin, the Lord of hosts come to save his people. Soon we will celebrate that first coming, but at the same time, we look ahead to his second coming. We look ahead to when this King who came in lowliness riding on the back of a donkey will return in glory to judge the living and the dead. So we watch and wait.

“See, your king comes to you...” With this special Guest coming, we need to prepare for his arrival, even more than we personally prepare for the arrival of our earthly guests. In fact, Christ's first arrival was so important that 400 years earlier he promised to send a prophet to prepare the way through the hearts of the people.

Yet this Advent season, the words of that forerunner John the Baptizer are shocking to our ears, ***“Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near.”*** (Matthew 3:2) He calls us to see the filth of our sins and turn from our wicked ways, to leave our sins with the King who makes the long, slow march to the cross to cleanse us of that guilt with his own blood.

“See, your king comes to you...” That King, who came in lowliness on a donkey, in miraculous lowliness comes to us daily through his Holy Word, through simple water connected with that Word, and through bread and wine as he gives us himself in his Holy Supper. He comes to us to give forgiveness and life and salvation, when before we had nothing but guilt and death and condemnation. Of course, such grace can do nothing else than move us to rejoice because Christ, the Lamb of God, comes to take away our sins with the sins of the whole world. Amazingly the King even continues to forgive us. Such grace moves us to rejoice because eternal life and eternal rest are ours in Christ. How remarkable that a King would stoop so low and so humbly as to save lowly sinners like you and me!

“See, your king comes to you...” The time has come to get ready for the arrival of our special Guest. The time has come to wave our palm branches and shout our praises to Christ our Savior-King for his three “advents.” He came. He comes. He will come again. That's why Advent is so filled with hosannas. The King is coming and we need to prepare for his arrival.

That King came to save as he had promised our forefathers centuries ago. ***“Hosanna to the Son of David!”*** That King came to crush the serpent's head and deliver us from the curse of death. ***“Hosanna! Lord, save us!”*** That King came to be a blessing to all nations. ***“Hosanna to the Son of David!”*** That King came to bear the burden of your sins and mine. ***“Hosanna! Lord, save us!”*** That King came to be born of a virgin and live in lowliness so you might live in glory forever. ***“Hosanna to the Son of David!”*** That King now comes to you in Word and Sacrament to forgive your sins. ***“Hosanna! Lord, save us!”*** That King will come to bring you and all believers to be with him in heaven forever. ***“Hosanna in the highest!”***

By grace, we have no doubt who's coming to us this Advent season and during this new Christian church year. So let's prepare for his Advent! ***“See, your king comes to you...Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*** Amen.