

**+ Matthew 21:1-11 + Series: Who Is Coming? + Theme: The King Is Coming! +
+ 1st Sunday in Advent + 27 November 2016 +**

It is almost cliché to describe these weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas as a “time of expectation.” You don’t have to work too hard or travel too far outside your front door to realize how much “expecting” is going on. It starts with a trickle of expectation in the days leading up to Thanksgiving. There’s a house to clean and decorate. Food to prepare. Guests to arrive—all for a great feast of food and fellowship, but as soon as the turkey is put away and the leftovers are packed up, the trickle of expectation widens into a stream of expectation.

Ads and coupons and toy catalogs have already found their way to homes, so plans for Christmas shopping begin. People map out how they’re going to shop, where they’re going to shop, what they’re going to shop for, and when they’re going to shop—all while hoping to get the best deals before the weekend is over. The stream widens into a river of expectation.

The days and weeks start flying by. There is the decorating and baking and family photos and Christmas cards (if you still send them) and parties and family get-togethers and last minute shopping for gifts and groceries. Here at church, there are plenty of preparations for Advent Night and Christmas for Kids and Christmas Eve and Christmas Day and New Year’s Day.

You may have special guests visiting this Christmas. Of course, if you do, you have extra work to prepare for their arrival getting rooms ready, the house cleaned, meals planned, and activities picked. All of this takes place, while the stores and commercials remind you and the kids that Christmas is only days away! The closer you get, the wider and faster the river of expectation becomes until Christmas finally arrives.

Every year during these weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, you can expect that life will become a busy, sometimes crazy, rapidly rushing river filled with expectation of what’s coming. Often lost in the midst of all of this Christmas expectation is one other expectation—one that is not so much “What is coming?”, but “Who is coming?” Yes, you may have special guests coming to your home, but “Who is coming?” is not about them.

Instead that question starts with a word that we don’t use all that often anymore outside of church circles—the word “Advent.” Advent comes from a Latin verb that means “to come into” or “to enter.” That brings us back to our question—“Who is coming?” Whose arrival are we expecting?

Since our first parents fell into sin, there has only been one answer to that question, though sometimes by different names—Messiah, Yahweh, Savior, Redeemer, Jesus. During the church season of Advent, these weeks are full of a different kind of expectation because Jesus is coming. The closer we get to Christmas, the more backwards that expectation seems to become.

At the beginning of Advent, we are encouraged to watch and wait for the return of Jesus. That’s how the Apostle Paul talks in the portion of his letter to the Romans (13:12) that we read earlier. **“The night is nearly over; the day is almost here.”** That’s how the Old Testament prophet Isaiah described the coming Savior’s kingdom—**“the mountain of the LORD,”** who will come to teach and judge and bring a final settlement of peace between the nations and God himself. (Isaiah 2:3) Yet Jesus isn’t just coming someday in the future.

No, Jesus still comes to us now through the gospel—through his Word and the waters of Baptism and the bread and wine of his Supper. That gospel draws us to Jesus and his precious gifts of grace. The Word of God also points us back to Christ’s first coming—as a weak infant sleeping in his mother’s arms, growing up in the ways and wisdom of the Lord, and carrying out the work long-promised over 4,000 years prior to his arrival. So like all those faithful believers who have gone before us, we long to see the coming of Jesus.

...But with all that Advent expectation in mind, you might notice something odd about our reading from God’s Word this morning. It doesn’t speak of Christ coming in judgement. It doesn’t speak of Jesus coming to give us forgiveness or life or salvation through the gospel. It doesn’t even speak of his first arrival at Christmas or look forward to it. No, this lesson speaks of a unique event at the beginning of Jesus’ final week—a day we commonly call Palm Sunday—when crowds welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem as king only days before he would be crucified as a criminal outside the city.

Yet even in this account recorded by Jesus’ disciple Matthew, you can’t miss the Advent expectation. **“Who is this?”** That question that the residents of Jerusalem and the pilgrim crowds asked was already pregnant with Advent expectation centuries before they asked it. We practically sang their question in Psalm 24:(8,10) earlier. **“Who is this King of glory? ...Who is he, this King of glory?”** Jesus was coming to Jerusalem—just as so many had expected, but he came for a reason that few anticipated.

Who is this Jesus coming into Jerusalem? For his disciples, their answer was a work in progress. Jesus was their rabbi who had been teaching them for the past three years, but he was more than just another teacher of the law. Jesus' disciples had come to realize that as he taught with an authority that no one else had, except for God himself. Jesus didn't quote the other rabbis and teachers, but spoke as God himself, even saying about himself, **"Before Abraham was, I am."** (John 8:58) The disciples had seen Jesus perform unbelievable, miraculous works of healing and casting out demons and feeding thousands with a boy's lunch and calming a sudden storm on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was more than just another rabbi, but who was he?

Earlier Jesus had asked his disciples, **"Who do you say that I am?"**, and Peter had spoken up on their behalf. **"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** (Matthew 16:15-16) While they still had their doubts, those three years of following Jesus had proved to them that he wasn't just God's Chosen One—the Messiah, but also the Son of God himself. Jesus was God in human flesh, and when he spoke, his disciples knew they had to listen and obey.

It shouldn't surprise us, then, when Jesus tells two of his disciples to fetch him a donkey for his entrance into Jerusalem—and they go without question. It's pretty amazing when you consider that Jesus told them, **"Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."** Jesus told them what they were to do, where they would do it, and how they were to respond to any questions—and the disciples went. Little did they realize, but it was time for the advent of the King.

Four to five hundred years before, the Old Testament prophet Zechariah had foretold this royal entrance. You can hear the Advent expectation in his prophecy. **"Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"** That prophecy of the advent of an unlikely King was so well-known among God's people that Matthew quotes it to prove that Jesus was that prophecy's fulfillment. So just imagine what all those faithful pilgrims, all those people who knew their Old Testaments thought as they saw the well-known Jesus riding humbly into that packed city on the back of a donkey! The King was finally coming, but in the most unexpected of ways.

There was no fine-tooled saddle for this King and no mighty war horse to bear his regal self into Jerusalem. When the two disciples brought back the donkey and her colt, they tossed their cloaks over the back of the colt **"and Jesus sat on them."** There would be no Roman-style triumph with dancers and priests preceding him and conquering armies and chained up slaves trailing behind. Yes, there were large crowds, but they were pilgrims in the city for the annual festival of Passover. A crowd of his disciples opened the way for him throwing on the ground their cloaks and palm branches sliced off the local trees, while an even greater crowd of pilgrims followed behind waving palm branches and praising the humble and gentle King of Glory, who was still clearly and truly **"the LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle."**

The fulfillment of an ancient prophecy deserves ancient hymns of praise. In this case, the crowds sang hymns of praise unheard in the streets of Jerusalem for 1,000 years, ancient psalms calling on the Lord of grace himself to deliver his people. **"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"** "Save us, Son of David! Save us, Son of God!" These were songs of praise that no one except the Savior-King, the King of Glory himself deserved.

The crowds praised Jesus as the Messiah, as David's Son who is also David's Lord, yet when they were asked, **"Who is this?"**, the answer that they gave was one of high praise, but was it high enough? **"The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'"** They had heard of this Jesus and his teaching unlike anyone else and his many miraculous works unlike anyone else—and they considered him to be the well-known prophet sent from God, but he was so much more than that!

Was Jesus a teacher? Yes. Was he a prophet? Certainly. Was he the Messiah? Absolutely. Was he a king? Of course. Even in humility riding on coats on the back of a donkey, Jesus was still all of those things, but even more than that, the King of Glory who entered Jerusalem's gates that day was coming to answer the pleas of the people for salvation and deliverance.

The King was not entering Jerusalem to take a throne at his coronation, but to be a holy lamb of sacrifice for the sins of all. The King was entering Jerusalem to suffer for the sins of all, though not one sin corrupted his own body, mind, or soul. The King was entering Jerusalem to die the death of a criminal for a world full of death row inmates. The King was entering Jerusalem to take his place in the grave that every man, woman, and child has deserved since the fall into sin. The King was entering Jerusalem to stomp on the throat of death and chain up Satan and sin with his resurrection.

The King came and accomplished what he had come to do, but even 2,000 years later, the King of Glory is still on his way. No longer will he ride on borrowed coats on the back of a donkey carrying him to suffering and death and the grave, but someday he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, to send every unbeliever to eternal condemnation in hell and to bring every believer body and soul to be with him in heaven forever. The final advent of the King of Glory is still coming.

Like so many before us, we watch and wait for his coming—even amid all the busyness of the weeks before Christmas. We prepare for the return of the King even as we prepare for the celebration of Christmas with all its events and activities. With loud hosannas and alleluias, we praise the coming King! Even as the days get darker and the schedule gets busier, we still look forward to the dawning of his light with great Advent expectation. May our expectation never dim until the King returns in glory! Amen.