

**Zechariah 9:9-12 + Turn to the Lord Who Comes to Bring Peace + Series: Turn to the Lord  
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY  
6th Sunday in Lent: Palm Sunday + 25 March 2018**

They call it “war fever.” It was 1914. When war was declared, people danced in the streets of Europe. People foolishly imagined that the war would be short. Gallant heroes would be made. Glorious songs of bravery would be written never to be forgotten. Victory would be swift and complete, but they were all wrong. Dancing turned to mourning. Gallantry and glory turned into four awful years of darkness and blood and battle in the trenches of WWI.

It was 1861. After Abraham Lincoln was elected president and southern states began to secede from the United States to form their own Confederacy, “war fever” spread throughout the land. Such “war fever” had been simmering in the South for years over the institution of slavery. It was only a matter of time before “war fever” boiled over. With the first shots fired on Ft. Sumter in South Carolina in April 1861, crowds mobbed recruitment offices. The valiant boys in blue were going to whip Johnny Reb and the gallant boys in gray were going to whip the Yankees. They’d all be home by Christmas, but they were all wrong. Gallantry and glory turned into four awful years of death and blood and conflict on American battlefields.

It was springtime around the year 33. The ancient city of Jerusalem was packed to overflowing with Jewish pilgrims in town for the Passover—the highest Jewish festival of the year. While there was an air of celebration everywhere, there was also tension. The Romans, who controlled the known world at that time, had increased their military presence around the city because of the huge crowds and because this region was a constant headache for the Roman government. Judea always seemed to produce revolts and plots and assassinations. Plus the Roman governor was in town for the festival. One successful plot and “war fever” would kick in. Decades later, a plot would lead to a Jewish revolt, but would lead to Jerusalem’s destruction.

Into this volatile mix in the spring of 33, into this region ever on the brink of war arrived a young rabbi named Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee. For the past three years, he had lit the Jewish world on fire. Thousands flocked to hear him preach, to have him heal loved ones, to witness his miracles. Many considered this Jesus to be the long-promised Messiah, the Lord’s Anointed. Many thought he would crush the hated Romans and establish a new Jewish empire that would rule the world for all eternity. Many thought he would bring a new era of prosperity to Israel. Would “war fever” boil over with his arrival? Would Jesus go to war and lead the people against the Romans?

The people expected a conquering warrior-king. What they didn’t expect was Jesus, sitting on a saddle of coats on the back of a donkey with no armor on his back and no army behind him. They didn’t expect Jesus, coming in humility to die a criminal’s death. They didn’t expect Jesus, even though he was the king they needed. They didn’t expect Jesus, but he was the king God expected to bring them peace. Five hundred years earlier through the prophet Zechariah, the Lord had described this unusual, unlikely, unexpected King who came to bring peace.

In Zechariah’s day, God’s people were in far worse shape than they were when Jesus arrived. The Jews had been in exile 1,000 miles from home for nearly a century, but the Lord in his grace had enabled a remnant of his people to come back to the land of Israel. Decades of neglect had left their ruined capital city and the ruined temple of the Lord overgrown with grass and weeds. The royal line of Israel’s kings that had stretched back 500 years was long gone. The Persian Empire now controlled the region.

Yet God promised that a King was coming, a King who would one day come riding into that very city to great praise and joy. As the Lord allowed Zechariah to peer ahead into the future, the prophet proclaimed, **“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout in triumph, Daughter Jerusalem! Look, your King is coming to you!”** Who is this King of glory? Why such praise?

The prophet urged God’s people, **“Look, your King is coming to you; he is righteous and victorious...”** Unlike any other king, ruler, president, governor, or emperor, this king is **“righteous.”** He wouldn’t just be upright and moral and honest among the people. He would be holy and sinless before God. He would have to be because this King was going to exchange his life for the lives of not just the Jews, but for the lives of every sinful human being who has ever lived or ever will live. In order to do so, he needed to be holy and sinless.

That way he could be **“victorious.”** He would have the ability to rescue God’s people from their worst enemies—not the Persians or the Romans or any other nation, but to save them from themselves, to save them from the sinful natures inside them, from the slavery of Satan and the oppression of death. This King would go to war against such enemies, and he would be the victor, but he would do so in the unlikeliest of ways.

The King would come **“humble and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”** The Jews of Zechariah’s day expected a mighty king to restore the grandeur of the glory days of old, but the Lord promised that his coming King would be **“humble.”** Kings weren’t humble. They were strong rulers who trampled their enemies. They certainly didn’t ride a common beast of burden like a donkey, let alone an unbroken colt. Kings didn’t take their chances with such a wild animal, but that’s exactly what you see in King Jesus!

Jesus humbly set aside his heavenly glory to become a human being and take on the lowly form of a servant. Though miraculously born of a virgin, he was considered the son of an outcast as people did the math. He grew up in poverty as the adopted son of a poor carpenter. Even in adulthood he had no place to rest his head as he went around proclaiming the good news of sins forgiven.

His closest friends were uneducated fishermen, seedy tax collectors, and common sinners. The lowliest of society considered him a friend, and he himself wasn’t impressive. What you might consider his greatest moment of kingly glory was nothing more than a brief, triumphant ride on a saddle of coats covering the back of an unbroken donkey into Jerusalem, where days later he would allow himself to be betrayed, arrested, beaten, and put to death on a cross.

Why come so humbly? Why not crush and dominate and destroy like so many other rulers over the years? The coming King goes to war to bring peace. **“I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem. The bow of war will be removed, and he will proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion will extend from sea to sea, from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth.”** The King would come not to whip up “war fever” against an earthly enemy, but to silence our natural “war fever” against God. King Jesus came to proclaim peace to the nations with no need for worldly weapons. He came to bring peace between a hostile world full of sinners and the holy God. While many clamored for war, King Jesus came to crush the power of sin and Satan and death to bring peace between God and us by the shedding of his blood and the victory of his empty tomb.

By the shedding of his blood on the cross, King Jesus would **“release your prisoners from the waterless pit.”** He would set souls free from sin’s captivity, from an eternity in hell’s waterless wastes. He would become the stronghold of God’s people and fill their hearts with hope—not for war, but real hope in his reconciliation between God and us. King Jesus would bring real, lasting peace back into our world, as he told his disciples on the night he was betrayed, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”** (John 14:27 NIV) King Jesus would bring the peace of forgiveness that frees you from the guilt of your sin. King Jesus would bring the peace of strength to stand firm against every attack on your faith. King Jesus would bring the peace of joy that flows from knowing he did it all for you and heaven is now open to you too.

The King comes to bring you peace! He brought you peace when he cleansed you of your sins in the waters of Holy Baptism and made you his beloved child. He brings you peace in the soul-nourishing food of his Supper. He brings you peace through his Word and even uses your stumbling lips to speak his peace to others to set them free from an eternity in hell’s waterless wastes.

Into a world at war with God, the time had come for the King to bring peace. King Jesus climbed up on the back of that donkey to sit on a saddle of coats. As the colt carefully made its way down the steep road that winds down the Mount of Olives towards Jerusalem, the crowds hailed Jesus as king, as Messiah, as Savior. Yet their songs were not hyper-patriotic “war fever” songs calling for war against an earthly enemy. They were faith-filled songs calling for the Lord’s salvation through Christ. **“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”** (Mark 11:9,10)

Into a world still at war with God, King Jesus brings us peace, and he is still unusual, unlikely, and unexpected, even for us. He comes righteous and able to save, yet humble and riding on the foal of a donkey. The time has come for the King not to whip up “war fever” against others or against God, but to proclaim peace to the nations in an upper room, on a cross, and in an empty tomb. The time has come for the King to extend his rule over the entire earth as his gospel goes out from us to the ends of the earth. The time has come for the King to set the prisoners free from the waterless pit and to return them to the stronghold of his protection. The time has come for the King to give us hope as he pours out grace upon grace through Word and Sacrament. The time has come to rejoice and shout in triumph because the King comes to bring us peace! **“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!”** Amen.