

**Starting Out on a Journey to Jerusalem**  
Luke 19:28-40  
**Trinity Lutheran – Kearney, Missouri**  
December 2, 2012 – First Sunday in Advent



In the name of the Father, and † of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Today is the First Sunday in Advent. That makes this the first Sunday of the new Church Year where we will begin looking at the life of our Savior through the eyes of the Evangelist, St. Luke. But on this First Sunday in Advent where the appointed Gospel reading is the account of Jesus riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, you might be asking: “Why is that? I thought this was Advent. Why have a Palm Sunday reading when you’re getting ready for Christmas? What’s up with that?” Well, by way of explanation we’re going to look at this reading from three different angles: how it fits for the start of Advent, how it fits into the theme of the new Church Year, and how it plays from the vantage point of St. Luke. Then from each of these viewpoints, we’ll see how this text fits for you and your situation. Today you and I are starting out on a journey to Jerusalem, and Jesus is leading the way.

So, how *does* this so-called Palm Sunday reading tie into the theme of the First Sunday in Advent? The connection, as I see it, is that we are following the theme of the coming of our Lord. That’s what the word “Advent” means: “Coming.” Advent is the season when we look forward to Christ’s coming – His coming at Christmas, to be sure, but also on the Last Day – not to mention His coming to us now in Word and Sacrament. Hence today’s Gospel, as well as the other readings, are calling out to us to get ready for the coming of our King.

The Gradual chanted a few moments ago captures this theme well: “Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” The Old Testament reading also prophesies concerning the coming of this Messiah: “Behold, the days are coming,” it says. The Epistle points us from there to the Last Day, “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And then finally the Gospel, the centerpiece of all the readings, pulls these events together. Christ coming into Jerusalem is the fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation, and the basis for our New Testament hope for the future. Jesus comes as Israel’s Messiah to establish peace between God and man as He opens up eternity for us, and calls forth our praise: “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

There’s the Christmas connection. When the people cried out at Jesus’ arrival: “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” it sounds an awful lot like what the an-

gels sang on the night of Christ’s birth, doesn’t it? – “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace.” And there is now a peace which exists between heaven and earth because of the coming of the Christ. He came at Christmas as a little Child, so that one day He could ride into Jerusalem as the righteous King, having salvation, who was preparing to ascend to His throne on Calvary’s cross.

And still He comes in our own day – right here in this place, here in this Divine Service, righteous and having salvation. Therefore we join in singing with the pilgrims of Jerusalem: “Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord,” because now, in this Divine Service, our Lord comes to us in His blessed Word and Sacrament. He comes to us here and now, announcing the peace He won for all mankind when He went to His death in Jerusalem. He comes to us now in this very place, giving us His true body and blood which earned for us forgiveness, life, and salvation. So it’s Advent, and here comes Jesus.

That’s how this Gospel reading fits for you today, on this First Sunday in Advent. But it’s also the first Sunday of the Church Year, and so this text fits perfectly in that scheme, as well, for it sets us off on a journey to Jerusalem. That’s where we’re going to go during this and every Church Year – to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is where it all leads, and that’s where it flows out from. The hinge, the focus, the pivot point of the whole Church Year, is Jesus going to Jerusalem as described in this text. Holy Week and Easter are the central focus for the entire year. So, Advent gets us ready for the coming of the Savior at Christmas – coming in the flesh so that He can suffer and die on the cross.

Epiphany follows as God’s Son is revealed to the world – His public ministry of healing and blessing showing clearly what His saving mission will produce. During Lent, the journey to Jerusalem intensifies with growing opposition and predictions of His upcoming Passion. Then comes Holy Week when Jesus rides into Jerusalem to suffer and die – for there is no other way for mankind to be saved except that the Son of God die for the sins of the world. Then at Easter the risen Christ shows Himself to His disciples in Jerusalem, where His victory over sin, death and the devil is on display for all the world to see. And so today we begin that journey to

Jerusalem, to Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter morning.

That week is the pivotal event of the entire year for us as Christians, for from that point on the rest of the Church Year unfolds. Our Lord ascends into heaven to sit at the right hand of God, and to set the Church out on her mission. The salvation Christ won for us during Holy Week forms the foundation for the long green season of teaching on our discipleship and life as the Church and people of God. And finally the Church Year looks ahead to the end times and our Lord's Second Coming – the hinge of it all being the Holy Week arrival of Jesus into Jerusalem. And so this text today – as strange as it may seem so close to Christmas – does a good job of giving us a focus for the year that's to come.

This is what I love about the Church Year. It keeps us close to Jesus. It puts us on a journey with our Savior that mirrors the salvation He won for us all – the salvation He has, and will bring us into. The Church Year keeps central things central and gives us the right perspective from which to look at life – as it points us to the power by which we live it. Today is the day we start out on that journey to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way.

I think that's why today's reading is so appropriate as we begin another year of looking at Christ's life through the eyes of St. Luke. For the city of Jerusalem plays such a prominent role in Luke's telling of the Gospel – perhaps more so than for any of the other evangelists – Matthew, Mark, or John. Luke, it seems, is always focused on Jerusalem. His account of Christ's life opens and closes in Jerusalem. It opens with the priest Zechariah serving at the Temple where the angel tells him he will be the father of John the Baptist. And the Gospel of Luke closes in Jerusalem, after Jesus' Ascension, when the disciples return to the city with joy, and worship at the Temple. And in between these bookends, the focus of the narrative is on Jesus setting His face to journey toward Jerusalem. Luke the Gospel-writer is taking us on a journey to Jerusalem in the way he tells the story of Jesus' life.

But why Jerusalem? What's so special about that place? Well, Jerusalem is the home of the Temple, the dwelling place of God with His people. The Temple is the place where God's appointed sacrifices were made – sacrifices to cover sin. And that was why Jesus had to

go to Jerusalem – to offer up the perfect, once-and-for-all Sacrifice for sin – yours and mine. For the Son of Man came to seek and save lost sinners like you and me.

And You and I have sinned, haven't we? We have not lived the life of love we ought to have lived – serving God our Creator in holiness, and our neighbor in love. *This* we have not done, and *that* is sin. Your conscience tells you this is so. And God's Word declares it to be so, even if your conscience has grown dim and dull. Even old Jerusalem, which was supposed to be the Holy City – was most unholy when it rejected her Messiah and nailed Him to a tree. And as a result God's judgment fell on Jerusalem.

Thus we would have fared no better, save for the Lord sparing us and giving us faith in our Lord and Savior. And so we give most hearty thanks to God for this saving faith bestowed as a gift through the Gospel! We give Him thanks for the Savior this Gospel reveals – Jesus Christ, the Holy One, the Savior of the world! Yes, Jesus is the King who comes into our midst, freely giving us the salvation he won for all by His journey to Jerusalem. And that set us on the pathway we are now traveling on our way toward the new Jerusalem – the Holy City, the dwelling place of God with His people, a place without sin, sorrow or death. And we're now on the road to that blessed place, you and I. The path we're walking is the way of faith and discipleship – of holiness, love, repentance and forgiveness. This is an Advent journey – a journey of hope, of looking forward to the future – even as we pay close attention to how we live here and now. We're on our way to the new Jerusalem, our eternal home, and that injects great joy into our journey.

So today, dear Christian, today is a day full of firsts. It's the First Sunday in Advent. It's the first Sunday in the new Church Year. And it's the first day in the year of St. Luke. But first and foremost, it's a new day in the Lord. Whatever detours or dead-ends may lie in the past, we know that now, by God's grace, we are starting out afresh – starting out on a journey to Jerusalem – and Jesus, our only Lord and Savior, is leading us on the way to our new heavenly home. May it always be so for His name's sake. Amen.

And now that peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in that one true faith in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.