

Your king comes to you
Matt 21:1-9

Advent 1

Nov 29, 2020

It must seem strange to have Palm Sunday starting Advent. It seems so out of place. We know it's Advent, and so we're getting ready for Jesus' birth. But we start with the last week of Jesus' life. What is this all about? You may have heard what's the connection, but with a year in between, you may have forgotten.

It has to do with what the line from Zech 9:9, that Matthew quotes here. See, your king comes to you. That alone might do it. Your king comes to you. He comes. He comes as the Lamb ready to be sacrificed. He comes as a human to be carried and then delivered by a young virgin woman. He comes as a bridegroom to take His bride home with Him. Take your pick. Actually, we'll pick all three, as that will be the structure for the sermon.

We're probably most comfortable with the "He comes as a human to be carried and then delivered by a young virgin woman." It's the Christmas one. That's the one we know the best because we rehearse it every year. Sometimes it is a literal rehearsal as the kids are getting their parts and getting ready to do the Christmas Eve program, starting with, "In the days of Caesar Augustus, a decree went out that all the world should be taxed."

So starts Luke 2 and the familiar Christmas story. We love this account. It's so familiar and we understand it so well. God has become a human being. It's so tender. He is born a baby, a helpless baby. He is visited by shepherds and later wisemen. Angels sing about Him. It's all the stuff of Christmas.

Yes, "He comes." That's Advent. That's what Advent means. Coming.

Christ is coming. Christmas is coming. Dec 24 and Dec 25, in particular. There's a lot that comes before it's here. A lot of joyful, comforting things. The music is a major part of it. It's like comfort food. When you're in unfamiliar territory, you find comfort in certain kinds of food, like the food you grew up with. And I'm finding myself being drawn to that music like comfort food, because everything around us is so unfamiliar. What we see happening around us has really shaken up our world.

Now, why am I saying that I'm being drawn to it, like it's something I'm trying to resist? Because I am trying to resist it. I want to deny myself the holiday classics, not the carols necessarily, but the Christmas songs that came out when I was a little boy. I want to listen to these, but I won't let myself. It's my own little thing. I don't expect anyone to follow suit, because it may not make any sense, but it's my own discipline. It might seem like a silly thing,

but there can be value in denying ourselves some of the things we want, even if they aren't bad for us.

It's my hope that by denying myself I will be able to keep myself sharp and aware that Christmas is all about Him coming the first time to set us free.

Which brings us to the next coming, the one we celebrate today. He comes as the lamb ready to be sacrificed. Early in Jesus' ministry John the Baptist, cried out when he saw Jesus, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the earth."

John's announcement is carried into the Divine Service. We sing it in the Gloria in Excelsis, the song of the service we give up during Advent. It starts with the angels' song, Glory to God in the Highest, the one sung to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem. We put away that song and save it for the time when the angels do come and sing their announcement to the shepherds. I think it's this that gave me the idea of denying myself listening to Christmas music until Christmas.

But think about what we do sing in this Hymn of Praise. We praise the Father, and then we spend a considerable part of this piece praising the Son, the Lamb that takes away the sin of the world. Three times--Trinity, no doubt--we praise Him by saying, "that takest away the sin of the world." And that's just in the first part.

When we get to the Service of the Sacrament, we have a whole song that is sung to Jesus as the Lamb. "O Christ, Thou Lamb of God that takest away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us." And then again, and then again but this time ending with 'grant us Thy peace.'

I've told my confirmation class, it's not good to be a lamb in the Bible. It's a wonder there were any sheep, because it seemed like the lambs were always being sacrificed. Because many were. And each one was saying the same thing: one day the Lamb, the Lamb of God was going to come, and He would be sacrificed.

And now He's come. He comes riding a donkey, not as a lamb, but as a king. But the lamb is still in view. He's not a powerful, scary king. He's more like a lamb. Who's ever heard of an aggressive lamb? A loud-mouthed lamb? A boastful lamb? No, the lamblike character shows by what He rides, a donkey. Zechariah says, "humble and riding a donkey."

It's not that kings didn't ride donkeys. They did. So did other dignitaries. It's that a king who hasn't been crowned as king yet rides a donkey. You don't do that if you want your subjects to recognize you as their king. He's obviously got a different message than someone who wants to

be recognized as a king and wants to rally his troops. No up-and-coming, self-respecting king would do what this king does.

Nor would he want what this king is prepared to take. This king's throne will be a cross. His crown will be thorns. The voice of His loyal subjects will be mockery, and what He will get as a return for this sacrifice will be hell. And yet this will be His victory.

The Lamb, the final Lamb will be sacrificed, just like all the lambs that had come before Him, having had the offenses of the sinner transferred to Him. He comes that He may die. He comes that He could pay our price for eternity.

He comes as our king, so that having paid our price, He can take us to be with Him eternally. We've now come to the coming as the bridegroom to take His bride to be with Him. This is probably the least familiar. This is the particular time of the year when we hear this. We looked at the end of the world with our Lord's joyous return last week, but it extends into Advent. Behold, your king comes.

Last week we heard the parable of the foolish and the wise virgins. Besides the hymn of the Day we sang last week, I heard another musical piece that was also based on that parable. Just as the parable is about Christ as the bridegroom, and His Church, the bride, so was this piece.

And since we are the bride, the stand in for the Church is our soul. So, for a major part of that piece, the soul of the believer sings to Christ, and Christ sings back to the believer's soul.

In the first part of what was sort of like a short opera, the couple are singing back and forth. The soul begs for her king to come, and the king reminds her He is on His way. The music is filled with yearning, because the soul wants to be with her husband to be. And honestly, Christ, as the husband wants to be with His bride. It's mutual yearning.

Let me pause here. Mutual yearning. Our souls want Him to come. They want to be with Him. That's our souls. That's the new creation. We aren't just our newly created souls, though. We aren't just the new nature. We have the old nature still there. Our sinful flesh. We're both of them.

As a result, it might be a little risky for me to say, "You want Jesus to come back." It's risky because you might say, "No, I don't."

I remember when I was a young kid and my pastor would say what I should want. And I thought to myself, "No I don't."

It was more than just a kid's rebellion. It was what was in me. It actually bothered me that I didn't want it.

So I hope I won't make that same mistake. The fact that you may not want His return, shows that battle we have going on in us. And yes, it is a battle, as Paul lays it out in Eph 4:21 you have heard about him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus, 22 to put off your old self, or to make it really short, "you were taught to put off the old self."

Now, it could be that you don't want Him to come back. You don't know what eternity will be like, maybe the very thought of it scares you, either way you may not be ready for life on earth to end. As rough as life can be, you're not sure you want it to be over. Or maybe you're not ready for Him to return because you are involved in a sin you know He wouldn't approve. Here's where you see the battle. This is the old man that is to be--as Paul says it--put off, to not be indulged.

Your redeemed soul, on the other hand, yearns for her Lord. That's why that piece is sung from the perspective of the soul, the new man that looks forward to Jesus' return.

Perhaps I missed that my pastor was talking about the new man in me. Anyhow, Advent is one of those seasons that we pay special attention to that battle. The new man in you, His baptized, born in you when you were first baptized, reborn in you when you take up the daily battle, yearns for His return just as in that musical piece, I had heard the soul and Christ making it clear they wanted to be together.

By the time we hear these two again, the music dances. They sing to another and quite often sing each other's lines. It's almost like they know each other so well, the one would start a sentence, and the other could finish it. It's what a marriage is to be like. This is the marriage between Christ and His Church, the model for all marriages.

And even though this coming may be the least familiar, this is really what it is all about. His coming the first time as a baby, His coming into Jerusalem to die, a continuation of the first coming, is all about bringing us to this coming, His return to take us to be with Him. This is where it is all headed. At the end of time, He will return. He will take us to be with Him. He will, as we see it said so many times, especially in Revelation, take us to be His bride. John's vision even describes us as a bride coming down out of heaven.

In the meantime, there is one more coming we haven't yet considered. He comes to us, our King comes to us in His Word and Sacrament. It is He Himself. We sing about this in many of our Advent hymns. Come, Lord Jesus, enter my heart. "Fling wide the portals of your heart." "Redeemer, come and open wide my heart, to Thee, O Lord, abide."

In His spoken Word, our Lord comes. Through the Holy Spirit, we receive Jesus Himself. He's chosen to give Himself to us through His spoken word and through the bread and wine, as He gives to us His body and blood and He enters our hearts, just as we ask Him in the Advent hymns..

For us to grow in our yearning for Him to return, for our yearning for Him to take us as His bride, for our love for Him to grow in return for all He has done, He gives Himself to us, transforming us, giving the new nature, giving our soul, more voice. So, as we start Advent and proceed through it, we not only understand it better, but we desire all He has for us more, as our king comes. AMEN

getting to know each other. They are singing to each other, but they take turns. They are polite because they don't know each other like a married couple would eventually. By the time we hear them again, you get a sense for how little they knew each other the first time, because now,

You get the impression *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* Musical piece based on it. Part of it explores the relationship between the Lord and the soul of the Christian, believer. The first time, they sound like they are just meeting. They're not really comfortable. They're sort of like getting to know each other. The next time we hear the two, part ,

If He's the king, that makes us royalty, a queen.

Mein heil; dein teil My Lord, Your part A tenderness in the Lord's voice.

But the next time the two voices sing, they sing their own lines and then they sing the same line together. Their lightness to it sound like a married couple bantering in a light-hearted conversation.

He comes to set us free. Righteous and having salvation.

They didn't understand. Matthew was part of that crowd and he didn't understand. Couldn't use all of zech 9:9 because it didn't fit.

He comes righteous and having salvation. The first time; in the meantime; in the endtime.