

First Sunday in **ADVENT**



Prayers

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Lord, You have given us the stars as markers of days and seasons, and we thank You for bringing us to the beginning of a new Church Year. Keep us faithful as we move through its observances and celebrations. May we gather often to hear the proclamation of Your Son and receive the gifts You so freely bestow upon us. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Heavenly Father, we do not know the time the Son of Man will come again, for that knowledge belongs only to You. Keep us wakeful, watchful and ever ready for His arrival, so that we, along with all Your faithful people, may be gathered from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Gracious Lord, as once Your people welcomed Your Son with palms and hosannas, so grant us faith to welcome Him who comes to us now in His Word and Sacrament and who will come again in glory as Lord and Judge to bring to completion all that He began. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Lord of all nations, as we await the full coming of Your promised Kingdom, be with all who make, administer and judge our laws. May they use the authority that You have given them wisely and according to Your will. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Merciful Father, hide not Your face from us. Look with kindness especially upon _____ and all who cry out to You in time of need. According to Your will, give healing to the sick, comfort to those who mourn and perseverance to those who suffer for the sake of Your name. Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Lord, even as we await Your coming in glory, You come to us here and now in the bread and wine of the Holy Sacrament of Your Son's body and blood. Grant that Your people might receive this Sacrament worthily, so that with sins forgiven and faith strengthened they would be preserved guiltless before You; Lord, in Your mercy; hear our prayer.

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Collect of the Day

Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Psalms 80:1-7

(antiphon v. 7)

Isaiah 64:1-9

1 Corinthians 1:3-9

Mark 11:1-10

or Mark 13:24-37

Hymns

Hymn of the Day – 332

Other Hymns – 355 (OT), 334 (G1, G2), 341 (G1), 343 (G1), 336 (G2), 353 (G2)



ADVENT SERMON

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT NOVEMBER 29 2020

Sermon Text: Mark 11:1-11

'Getting The Full Story'

Today is the first Sunday in the new season of the church year called Advent – the four week fast before the feast of Christmas. Sadly, we don't have much of a concept of fasting and feasting in our consumer culture these days, or even in the church. Of course, we go for the fun stuff like Christmas and Easter; but leave behind the heavier, contemplative seasons like Advent and Lent. We like the feast but not the fast. And as a result we really do neither. Instead, we gorge ourselves for what we generically call the 'holiday season,' and then wallow in a hangover of postholiday guilt and dieting. It's a superficial way to live. And which is why the quiet contemplation of Advent is so necessary . . . that is, prepare for Christmas by prayer and fasting, with generous works of mercy and eyes firmly fixed on the day of Christ's advent in glory.

Now, the word advent means 'coming' or 'appearing,' originally used in the ancient world for the appearing or coming of a king or a god. When we speak of the season of Advent, we are thus referring to both our Lord's first appearance in humility as the Child born of Mary, and to His second appearance in glory at the end of this age. Both of which call for watching and waiting for the coming of the Lord.

To be sure, it is also a kind of countdown to Christmas. And Advent certainly is a preparation for Christmas. Not, however, in the sense of how many shopping days are left, but in the sense of preparing for something big and bright and beautiful. Big celebrations, after all, take some planning and preparation. And when we are celebrating the fact that God's eternal only-begotten Son became man to save the whole world . . . well, that takes a bit of preparation.

In addition, Advent is also a sort of countdown to the birth of the new creation. And the image of pregnancy is a good one for Advent. It's the fullness of time.

History is pregnant with the promise of God . . . expectant, hopeful. The birth pangs have already begun – wars, rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines, floods, disasters and diseases. “These are the beginning of the birthpangs,” says Jesus. The labour pains of the new creation. Think of a mother expecting a child. She lives in expectation, anticipating the birth of her child. She lives for it. She doesn’t know precisely the day or the hour, and so she must watch and wait. She knows the signs. She knows that the day is coming soon, it inevitably and relentlessly draws nigh. She watches and waits with eager expectation.

The readings for the past number of weeks at the end of the church year just past were telling us that – “The kingdom of heaven is like” . . . a bridegroom, a landowner, a king on his throne. And today, the first Sunday in the new church year, we hear about Jesus entering Jerusalem like a king. A few days previous He and His disciples had arrived at Bethany – a little town a few miles outside of Jerusalem, the home of Mary and Martha and their then dead brother Lazarus who Jesus called forth out of the tomb, calling him to awake from death . . . and that too had the signature of the kingdom of heaven written all over it.

So today, as we start afresh with Advent, we hear about Jesus riding into Jerusalem with joyous fanfare as the people wave their palm branches and greet Jesus along the way . . . a most fitting reading for Advent as it speaks of the coming of the King to His holy city, the church. And yet, it does seem rather strange to our ears, doesn’t it? After all, this account is one that we recognize as belonging to Palm Sunday and the beginning of Holy Week, not to Advent.

Now, as Jesus travels along the road from Bethany past Bethphage on a borrowed colt that had never been ridden, the people go on before Him and follow behind shouting out, “Hosanna! (which means ‘save us’) Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” Fitting words, appropriate words for the beginning of Advent . . . the Lord Jesus coming to save – to save us from our sins. But is that really how the people back then understood those words that they were shouting out?

We do ourselves no favour by not knowing history. To understand this event properly, it is helpful to understand history . . . more specifically, to understand what went on during those 400 years or so between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament – what is called the intertestamental period. There are several books that fit into that time period . . . one of them being the first Book of Maccabees with its record of the successful struggle of the Jews against Antiochus Epiphanes, a Greek-speaking ruler over Syria – which includ-

ed at that time also Judea. He forcefully sought to impose Greek culture on his subjects – Greek language, Greek religion, Greek manner of dress. And he even defiled the temple in Jerusalem by erecting a statue of Zeus in the temple sanctuary, calling himself Zeus-incarnate, and had pigs sacrificed on the altar. Those Jews who would not follow pagan customs were arrested and executed – normally by means of crucifixion. If discovered, mothers who circumcised their baby boys were put to death along with their newborn babies.

A Jewish priest by the name of Mattathias, along with his five sons, resisted by organizing a fighting force . . . much like a guerilla army or freedom fighters. Through a series of raids and military campaigns, along with support from foreign kingdoms like Rome, the Maccabean forces, as they were called, regained the city of Jerusalem and in 165 A.D. repaired, cleansed, and reconsecrated the temple that had been defiled – and which today is celebrated by the Jews with their annual festival of Hanukkah. It would take, however, another 20 years or so before the Syrians were finally driven out of Judea by one of Mattathias' sons by the name of Simon who functioned both as king and priest. And as Simon rode up the road to Jerusalem, he did so as 1 Maccabees, chapter 13, verse 51 puts it: “with praise and palm branches, hymns and songs”; and with another “cleansing of temple and the city from its pollutions.”

Now, when Jesus rides into Jerusalem, those who welcomed Him did so with a vivid national memory of the Maccabean uprising. Many were hoping for a Messiah who would deliver them from Rome the same way the Maccabees had delivered their forefathers from the Greeks. Simon Maccabeus was viewed as a new David, a national hero, even praised as “the saviour of Israel.” This is what the people wanted on that first Palm Sunday – another David, another Simon Maccabeus . . . and why they waved their palm branches amidst shouts of “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!”

And if ever there was an opportunity for Jesus to lead a violent uprising, this was it. Jesus knew what they wanted; but did not give it to them – at least not in the way they expected. “Your king is coming to you, humble and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden” is how the Old Testament prophet Zechariah prophesied of this event. What a difference between this king and a worldly king like Simon Maccabeus entering Jerusalem astride a war horse! Instead, Jesus rides a humble donkey. And in doing so, He is showing the people, and especially His disciples, that He is a different kind of king. Writing in the fourth century, the church father St. John Chrysostom noted: “He is not drawn in a chariot like other kings, not demanding a tribute. Nor surrounded by officers and guards. Then the people ask: ‘What king has ever entered Jerusalem riding upon a donkey?’.”

When you think of this event in worldly terms, Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is rather ridiculous. And yes, Jesus knows how weak and ridiculous He looks riding on a donkey as He makes His 'triumphal' entry. Just as in a few weeks we will be celebrating the 'ridiculousness' of His birth in Bethlehem – wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. In each case, it is the entry onto the scene of a King such as the world has never seen before.

And by this our coming Lord wants His disciples, you and I, to understand what true kingship is. It is humble. It serves. To be sure, after His entry, Jesus does go into the temple and cleanse it of its defilement . . . much as the Maccabees once did; but unlike the Maccabee brothers, Jesus does it without a sword. He drives out the sellers and money-changers with a whip; but a few days later lays down the whip, takes up a cross, and gives up His own life for unclean, defiled sinners like you and me . . . for our salvation, to be the one full and complete sacrifice for sin, the long-awaited Suffering Servant, the Lamb of God who would lay down His life for the sins of the world.

And on this first Sunday in Advent, as we hear of the triumphal entry of Palm Sunday, we also cry out with our "Hosannas." We do so because of the victory over sin and death that comes through the cross of Jesus, our true and only Priest and King, who once came in humbleness, riding on a donkey; who comes to us today in His Word and in the holy Sacrament of His very body and blood; and who will come again in glory, riding on the clouds of heaven, accompanied by angels and archangels and the whole company of heaven, crying out with those same words: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

And until that day, during these in-between times of His coming, we prepare for Christmas by prayer and fasting, with generous works of mercy and eyes firmly fixed on that Day of Christ's advent in glory. Amen.