

St. Peter Lutheran Church - Modesto, CA

✠ First Sunday of Advent ✠

November 27, 2005

Sermon by Pastor Johann Caauwe

“As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to 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.”

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “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.’”

The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest!”

(Matt. 21:1-9, NIV)

There were no parties to celebrate it; no one stayed up to wait for it. There was no ball drop and you don't have to change your calendar this morning, so when you arrived at church this morning you may not have known that today is the first day of a new liturgical church year. That's okay. I'm sure that when you saw the color blue on the altar area and saw the Advent wreath and sang hymns like “The Advent of our King” and “Savior of the Nations Come”, you quickly realized that it was Advent.

Now, if you had walked into church and saw purple and palm branches and you sang “Ride on, Ride On, in Majesty, in lowly pomp ride on to die,” you might be confused. So maybe you were a little confused by the Gospel for today that records the events, not of Jesus' entrance into this world as a baby, but of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. If you wonder what these events have to do with Advent, you're probably not alone.

Imagine, for a moment, that you had witnessed the events recorded in the Gospel for today. Put yourself in the sandals of a citizen of Jerusalem. You've heard lots of things about this Jesus, but you've never actually seen him. You heard that he just raised a man named Lazarus from the dead and a group of your friends heard that Jesus was coming this way. Since you had some errands to run by the city gate, you thought you'd check it out. As you neared the gate, a crowd of people was rushing from the city to meet Jesus. So you followed along and there he was. But something was different. Jesus normally walked everywhere he went. Here he was riding on a donkey. The crowds of people were going crazy. They were shouting things to him, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” and placing their clothes and palm branches on the road before him. Do these people think he's a king? Look at him, he's riding a donkey. No king rides a donkey. And you begin to wonder, “Maybe these people know something that I don't know. Who is this man?”

My friends, I believe that each one of us would be just as confused about these events and about Advent in general were it not for the inspired insight of the Gospel-writer Matthew. Someone

had to tell us what was going on. And Matthew does just that when he writes, “**This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:** So it’s really not Matthew who explains these events. It’s God, who spoke through his prophets. And God has a message for his people. In a sense, God has an Advent sermon that he wants spoken to “**the daughter of Zion,**” that is, the believing people of God. And here is his message that will help you understand Advent, that will help you understand Jesus’ coming: **Behold, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**”

God’s Advent sermon begins with an attention-getting introduction: Behold! It’s God’s way of saying, Pay attention! Take a look! You won’t believe what I’m about to show you or tell you. It’s something so amazing and so surprising that you never would have guessed. You never would have figured this out on your own. I have something important to tell you.

Now that God has our attention, he moves immediately into his first part: “**Behold, your king comes to you.**” That sounds so simple, but “Behold,” he says, “take a closer look.” Here God is speaking to people who do not actually have an earthly king. Matthew is quoting a passage from the book of Zechariah, who wrote to the Jewish people who had returned from captivity in Babylon and were living near Jerusalem. There was no king of Israel. Darius was the king of Persia, the world empire at that time, but the people of Jerusalem would have been quick to point out that Darius was not *their* king.

Rome was the world empire at the time of Jesus and Caesar was king. But the people of Jerusalem did not really believe that Caesar was the King of the Jews. Even though they told Pontius Pilate that they had no king but Caesar, they really meant that they have no king.

But God says to his people, “**Your king comes to you.**” You do have a king, but he is like no other king you know because “**your king comes to you.**” Every other king makes you come to them and submit to them and pay taxes and tribute to them. Every other king is greedy and makes demands of you and takes from you. Your king comes to you and gives to you.

I think that most Americans think along the same lines as the Jewish people of Bible times. I think that when we think of kings, we think of harsh laws, taxation without representation, and absolute power and tyranny. If someone came to us and offered to be our king we would say, “no thanks. we don’t want to have anything to do with a king. We want to be free.”

I think that sometimes that attitude pervades our spiritual lives as well. We sometimes think of God as a spiritual king who just makes demands on people and keeps them from doing the things they want to do. And we want to have nothing to do with that kind of king. The sinful nature in us would like just go on living the way we live and be free from the rule of any king. Unfortunately that road does not lead to freedom, but to slavery to sin, death and hell. We do need a king – not a king who forces us to work for him and come to him – we need a king who comes to us.

Jesus comes to us and comes for us. He did that once, long ago, as he came to this world, not to rule over us with an iron fist but to give all the benefits of his perfect life and death. He came to bear the weight of our wickedness and suffer for our sin. He didn’t do that because we had been such faithful citizens who earned a place in his kingdom and decided that God should be our king, no, our king came to us.

And our king still comes to us. In his Advent sermon, God reminds us *how* he comes to us – this time not as a baby in a manger – **your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

To be honest, Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey wasn't much to see. There wasn't much to behold. He certainly didn't look like a king. He didn't act like a king. In fact, there was nothing to distinguish this Galilean from anyone else. There was no reason to cover the road with cloaks and palms, except for this: **"Behold, your king comes to you gentle and riding on a donkey."** The prophet Zechariah prophesied that the king (the Messiah) would come to Jerusalem riding on a donkey. By doing that, Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophet and came exactly the way God said he would come. He came lowly and humbly.

That's the way he came the first time. He was born in a borrowed stable and slept in a borrowed manger. Here we see him humbly riding to his death on a borrowed donkey. After suffering and dying a humiliating death he was laid in a borrowed grave. We should be used to seeing Jesus in humility.

So we should also not be surprised to know that our king continues to come to us gently and humbly. He doesn't break into our world with thunder claps and lightning bolts. He doesn't come with armies and angels. No, he comes just as he said he would come.

Our king comes to us when his Word is read or heard. It's not flashy or glitzy, but God has told us that his Word is truth, that his Word is sharper than a double-edged sword, that it is able to make us wise for salvation, that it was written that we may know that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing we may have life in his name. Jesus our king comes to us exactly as he said he would – through his saving Word.

Our king comes to us when water is applied together with the word and promise of God. It looks like just plain water, and it is, but God has said that he saved us by the washing with water and the Word and that no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again by water and the Spirit and that Baptism now saves you. Jesus our king comes to us exactly as he said he would – through the cleansing waters of baptism.

Our king comes to us when his own body and blood are joined with bread and wine. It looks like regular bread and wine and tastes just like bread and wine. Yet Jesus says it is his body which was given for you and his blood which was shed for you. He says, "Do this in remembrance of me, and in doing so you will proclaim my death and receive all the blessings my death and resurrection have won for you." Jesus our king comes to us exactly as he said he would – in his Holy, saving Supper.

Jesus our king comes to us in his Word and Sacraments – just as he said. And just as the people of Jerusalem would not have known to look for Jesus to come riding a donkey, we would not have known to find Jesus in his means of grace if he had not told us. In fact, we would not have looked for a king at all. We could not sing "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" or "Savior of the Nations Come" or "Hark the Glad Sound! the Savior Comes" if our God had not told us about his Advent, his coming. We wouldn't have known to look for a king. And we wouldn't have known where to find him. But God has spoken: **"Behold, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey."** Because God has preached such a clear Advent sermon to us, we know and believe that Jesus our King does come to us and will come to us. And so we pray during this Advent season and always, "Come, Lord Jesus." Amen.