

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“And when [Jesus] entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, ‘Who is this?’ And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee’” (Matthew 21:10-11).

Today, we begin a new Church Year, and the purpose of every Church Year is to put Jesus before our eyes.

To the world, most of their minds – *maybe even yours* – is on Christmas. Most of the world is thinking about Christmas decorating and shopping for loved ones. Radio stations began playing pop Christmas songs on November 1. And for so many of us, when you think about Jesus this time of year, we often think of Jesus as the babe in the manger.

But here we are on this First Sunday in Advent, and we hear about Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem. What’s up with that? Again, the purpose as we begin each Church Year is that we do not lose sight on what truly matters: Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen for sinners.

It always does seem odd though to begin the Church Year at practically the end. But this is why Jesus came in the first place. He came to bring atonement between God and man.

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the Magi came from the east to Jerusalem and asked, *“Where is He who has been born king of the Jews?”* (Matthew 2:2). This question greatly disturbed King Herod. He was troubled. This troubled Herod because he was obviously nearing the end of his time and was not sure who would succeed him. And there was no doubt that Herod’s violent and bloody reign had demonstrated how determined he was to maintain his grip on power – *even though his power was severely limited being under Roman rule.*

So when Herod’s fear was aroused, all of Jerusalem was disturbed right along with him.

Now, some thirty-plus years have passed between that first Christmas Day and Palm Sunday, and during that interval St. Matthew does not record a single time Jesus was called a king. He was called many other titles. Jesus was called “Son of David,” and that messianic title certainly does come with royal overtones, but it was not until that Palm Sunday that Jesus was proclaimed to be a king. According to St. Luke, the crowds roared: **“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord”** (Luke 19:38a). And according to St. John, the crowds cheered: **“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”** (John 12:13). And once again, some thirty-some years after His birth, **“the whole city was stirred up”** again (Matthew 21:10).

They ask, “Who is this Jesus?” “Where has this Jesus come from?”

Back when Jesus was 12 years old, He famously went up to Jerusalem with His mother Mary and His guardian Joseph to celebrate the Feast of the Passover (Luke 2:41-52). When the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. After searching for Him, they returned to Jerusalem and after three days, they found Him in the temple.

Now, traveling to Jerusalem for the Passover was something pious Jews did every year. So, we can assume that Jesus made many trips to Jerusalem to observe the Passover. But *this* time would be different. Very different. For *this* occasion, Jesus was very much aware that He was going up to Jerusalem to die. And He taught this fact to His very own apostles that He would be handed over to the chief priests and later condemned to death, but on that third day would rise again.

As Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for the last time, He wanted the attention of all the people of Jerusalem to be focused solely on Him. This is why He made some rather peculiar preparations before entering the city.

“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once” (Matthew 21:1-3).

This would be a strange way for Jesus to be acknowledged as the King of Israel. Through the Prophet Zechariah, God calls the coming King **“humble”** (Zechariah 9:9).

Normally, powerful people are *not* humble. Normally, powerful people are far from being called “humble.” Normally, powerful people are aware of how important they are, and they expect others to be duly impressed by and deferential to them. They can be harsh and abrasive, because they *have* power. Normally, to be humble or gentle is seen as a sign of powerlessness. Not so with Jesus.

Jesus enters Jerusalem upon an ordinary lowly beast of burden rather than a magnificent white stallion, as other kings would have done. Jesus did not wear a kingly robe or royal crown. There was no scepter in His hand. His attendants were mostly Galilean fishermen. His procession looked far from a royal procession, yet there was an obvious and undeniable majesty about Him. This Jesus was powerful, but not in the way of the world (1 Corinthians 1:25).

This humility of Jesus is the theme from the manger all the way to the cross. It is a weakness according to the world, but it is powerful because God works salvation in it. Salvation is not accomplished by external force or by gaining earthly power. Jesus’ humility is not a sign of powerlessness, but of a refusal to rule by force or coercion, and of His willingness to die for us.

Again, Jesus’ procession into Jerusalem didn’t look like a royal procession, but the multitudes were moved to shout: ***“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”*** (Matthew 21:9).

According to earthly standards, Jesus was far from being a king. He rode into town on a donkey. That’s a far cry from any royal steed. But Jesus is the King.

Because Jesus’ kingdom is not of this world, His mission has often been misunderstood. Herod feared Jesus as competition. Jesus was handed over to Pilate because He was declared a challenge to Caesar. But Jesus has not come to overthrow earthly rulers, nor to establish any earthly kingdom.

Jesus rules only by Word and Spirit, not by any external force. Jesus rules by calling and enlightening His disciples. He gives faith and a change of heart, so that we cling to Him as King. We didn’t choose Him as King, He chose us and made us His people.

Jesus is the mighty King. He is more powerful than all the great kings of all times. He is more powerful than all the world leaders of our own day.

Only He, by His cross, has the power to save from sin. **Only He** has the power to grant eternal life. **Only He** has the power to make enemies of God into children of God. **Only He** has the power to transform us so that we live godly lives.

Certainly, the manner by which Jesus entered Jerusalem on that Palm Sunday showed that He had no intentions of setting Himself up as an earthly king. The throne He would ascend would not be a fancy seat, but His throne to which He would ascend would be Him nailed to a crude wooden cross. The crown He would wear would not be adorned with jewels but would be a crown of thorns piercing His forehead.

Yet, Jesus would establish His Kingdom, but not by the traditional way by shedding the blood of his enemies, but by shedding His own holy precious blood. Through His humility, through His innocent suffering and death, Jesus would establish a Kingdom of greater glory and greater majesty than any earthly kingdom before or since. He gave all who trust in Him His Kingdom.

Today's Gospel reading contain some very familiar words that we sing each Sunday: "*Hosanna. Hosanna. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.*" These familiar words of the Sanctus remind us that the same Jesus who rode up into Jerusalem on a donkey comes to us under the bread and wine of the Sacrament of the Altar. On our own, we would never guess that we are receiving Christ's very Body and His very Blood in this Sacrament, but Jesus says, "***This is My Body. ... This is My Blood.***" Through the eyes of faith, we see so much more than just simple bread and simple wine, because our ears have heard what Jesus said.

We sing the Sanctus as we praise Christ knowing who He is, the promised Savior. We praise Christ, who feeds us with His Body and Blood for the forgiveness of our sins, praising Him for who He is, our Savior, and for what He richly does, forgives our sins.

The crowds on that Palm Sunday may not have seen the significance of their own words, but we on this First Sunday in Advent do. He came to inaugurate His royal kingdom. Jesus has come to be our King. He has come to bring reconciliation between God and man. He is Here today hidden in His Means of Grace. And He will one day truly reveal Himself again on the Last Day! Christ is King. Amen. Come Lord Jesus.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +