

Matthew 21:1-11
First Sunday in Advent
November 30, 2025

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

When we *ended* the previous church year *last* Sunday focusing on Christ's return and second coming, one might expect we'd *begin* the new church year *this* Sunday by anticipating Christmas and Christ's first coming. But the chosen readings that you heard don't sound very much like Christmas, do they?

In fact, this first Sunday of the Church Year sounds more like a *continuation* of the last Church Year (last Sunday and this Sunday: Jesus processing to the cross) rather than a starting over... a reminder for us that, if we are to prepare properly for the joyous news of Christ's *first* coming in the flesh, we ought be mindful that the whole point of Christ's first coming in the flesh is Christ's *second* visible coming in the flesh. Or, perhaps to say it the other way around, with words just recently in our ears:

As I mentioned in last Sunday's sermon, we struggle to believe Jesus' prophetic word that He will come again in glory... we have a hard time imagining it will actually one day happen on the human calendar and bring a final day to earth's time and history.

And so, to more faithfully remain ready for the incarnational reality of that second coming long-prophesied, we must go back to the *first* time God's long-prophesied Word was fulfilled incarnationally in human history. *That* is why we start the church year over and go through the annual exercise of meditating upon Christ's earthly life; it's always with an eye on the *second* coming that we meditate upon the *first*. It's always in light of Christ's appeal (as we heard recently) – “Stay alert; do not be led astray” – that we remain focused on God's prophetic Word fulfilled in history for our *salvation*, that we may live with patient certainty that it will be fulfilled again for our *vindication*.

In other words, you must ask yourself, “Do I eagerly anticipate Christmas because God made me promises regarding this specific holiday season to come (and I know they're going to come on the snowflakes!), **or** do I eagerly anticipate Christmas because God made me promises regarding the incarnate Christ who is to come again? And, if He is to come again, I ought be focused on His coming, ready for His coming! And what better way to prepare than to meditate on the fact that – in order to be the Son of Man coming upon the clouds, He must first have once become the Son of *man*... more properly, the son of the virgin, coming in flesh and blood, swaddled in cloths, and laid in a manger”... that he might go to the cross and fulfill it all, as was prophesied.

And yet, we're right back to the fact that our readings today – to start Advent preparation – don't really sound like Christ's *first*

advent, but also not totally like his *second* advent. And, in a sense, we realize that this (weekend's) morning's Readings are chosen more *thematically* than *chronologically*.

Thematically, all of human history funnels down (if you will) to Holy Week, to Christ's 'advent to the cross'... riding atop the donkey as the coming Savior and King... despised by the nations, even as he fulfills the prophetic Word meant to benefit those same nations. Certainly, that visual of the Palm Sunday procession and the shouts of Hosanna and the *incarnate* king in lowly state resolutely determined to go to the altar of sacrifice, to the cross itself – that visual, ending at the altar of sacrifice, is the central visual of all of history and its calendar, isn't it? It ties everything together, so that the *former* days (Old Testament) meet their fulfillment in that holy week, and the *latter* days (New Testament) find their beginning in that holy week... and the prophets can speak of the latter days *coming to pass*, and the apostles can speak of the 'the time' being *at hand*.

In fact, isn't that how our Old Testament reading and Epistle reading both begin... by alluding to this great thematic (and historical) reality of Christ's coming. Our Old Testament reading, Isaiah, begins: "It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it." Wasn't that *established* at the cross,

as Jesus himself prophesied, “I when I am lifted up, will draw all people unto myself.” Certainly that wasn’t a purely chronological statement – *not* all the people were drawn locally that day to Golgotha... but, those of every day who know the truth of the Gospel confess with St Paul, “[We] desire to know nothing... but Jesus Christ and Him crucified” and again, “There is one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus.” Yes, in Christ Jesus, the gospel can go out to all nations, that all the nations may flow to the house of the LORD... and many peoples shall come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” In other words, ‘that we may learn the holy will of God and the joy of being His people’... or, as Jesus himself says it, “Remain in My Word, and you will be my disciples. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Free in the work of the cross; free in the forgiveness of sins; free, with a clear conscience before God and with love toward one another... so that we *rejoice* that his judgment between the nations includes such holy wisdom and equity in His Word (the beauty of the Ten Commandments!) that swords may be beat into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks... and God’s people may simply delight in walking in the light of the LORD.

And, if that’s how the *Old Testament* reading anticipates the latter days, commencing with the work of Christ on the cross, how

does the *Epistle* Reading begin? – “You know the time,” Paul says to his hearers, “that the hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand.”

“Wait a minute!” You pause, “What does Paul mean, ‘Salvation is *nearer* to us now than when we first believed’? Hasn’t Christ already *accomplished* salvation?” Yes, that central week of history is forever cemented in human history – “It is finished. It is accomplished. Tetelestai!” Christ cries from that cross. So, Paul, writing just a few *decades* after that holy week, can *look forward to* the second coming... just as Isaiah *looked forward to* the ‘latter days’... those latter days just before the dawning of the Last Day... in the same way, Paul can speak of salvation being won by Christ on the cross, but then – what draws nearer than when we first heard the good news of the cross and first believed? What draws nearer still, each and every day, is when our salvation will be incarnationally experienced in full on that Last Day in the resurrection of all flesh and the realized inheritance of life everlasting in the new creation, just as Jesus prophesied!

So, notice where Paul goes with his focus on that great and glorious Last Day; he says, in anticipation of this, “cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime”... not in the sinful darkness of the ways of this condemned and dying world (“not in orgies and drunkenness, not in

sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy” – sadly, isn’t that a *perfect* description of our society?). No, that’s not how Christians act as they anticipate the End; rather, Paul admonishes each and every one of us, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh (not meaning “the human body”, but meaning, “Old Adam”), to gratify its desires.”

Notice, *how* do we prepare for the End? (And *how* does Advent prepare us for another year of meditating on the first coming of Christ as we anticipate His second coming?) We “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” But, how does Paul say that – “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” – to a bunch of Christians who are already baptized? Have we not *already* ‘put on Christ’? Doesn’t he say elsewhere, “All who have been baptized into Christ have *put on Christ*”? And doesn’t he, even seven chapters earlier in this same epistle to the Romans famously speak of Baptism *tying us* to Christ’s death that we may also share with him in his resurrection? So, if we have already been *united* with Christ in baptism, if we have already been *tied* to Him, if we have already *put on* Christ, what does Paul mean by exhorting Christians to ‘put on the Lord Jesus Christ’?

He means simply to live every breath of life, every minute of every relationship, every day of every vocation, in your baptism... not as if you were just once baptized, but “I *am* baptized.” For, baptism *does* tie us to Christ Jesus, so that we rejoice in His redeeming work, love His holy will, and long for His glorious appearing. Indeed,

baptism is the express result of His *first* coming, that we may live in full anticipation of the resurrection as the express result of his *second* coming. How does Paul say it to the Galatians (we just focused on this central passage): “In the fullness of time God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under law, to redeem those under law, that we might receive adoption as sons.” And, with that express result of His first coming, with that adoption, the Holy Spirit fills our hearts and teaches us to rejoice in our salvation, love God’s holy will, and cry out, “Abba! Father!” Or, to say it otherwise, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” Or, to say it another way, “Lord, I love the habitation of your house and the place where your glory dwells.” Or to say it another way, “Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he, blessed is he, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.” Those are the cries of baptism. And they are cries that anticipate His *second* coming all by living the baptismal life by which we were baptized into the fulfilled promises and salvific work of his *first* coming.

So then, to remain alert and not be led astray as we await His second coming, let us remain firmly in baptism and the baptismal life of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (isn’t that what we’ll hear from John the Baptist in the weeks to come)... which is to say, let us remain in the life of Jesus, Him whom we put on in Baptism. And, if

we are to remain in the life of Jesus, if we are to stay awake and hopeful that our *Lord* Jesus will one day fulfill the prophetic Word of His glorious return and the redemption of our bodies, what better exercise and meditation than to dwell on and hear again the full calendar of good news that the same *Christ* Jesus once fulfilled God's prophetic Word of his incarnation and the redemption of our souls. And for such annual exercise for our baptismal life, what better sustenance and nourishment than to regularly and weekly be gathered at the family Table of God to receive that same incarnate Jesus, even as we rejoice in His sacramental coming – just as we rejoiced at His first coming, and just as we will rejoice at His last – “Blessed is He, blessed is He, blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord.”

In the Name of the Father
And of the Son
And of the Holy Spirit.
+ AMEN +

Rev. Mark C. Bestul
Calvary Lutheran Church
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