

The First Sunday in Advent

Text: Matthew 21:1-11 (NIV)

¹As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ²saying 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. ³If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.” ⁴This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ⁵“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.’” ⁶The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. ⁷They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. ⁸A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹The 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!” ¹⁰When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” ¹¹The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Theme: It's Springtime in the Church

This is such a dark and gloomy time of year. The days are short. It's cold outside. We already have snow. We know that things will only get worse. There are things that should make us happy at this time of year, that don't seem to bring a lot of cheer either. People look for happiness in shopping. A number of people even left their Thanksgiving celebrations early to shop. Others got up in the early hours of the morning to stand in line in the cold. But did that bring much joy. I saw several stories on Friday of people being beaten, and shot over Black Friday bargains. I also read that the stores are laughing all the way to the bank at this time of year, because while we think that we are getting bargains, in reality they charge more for almost everything. The world seems dark and gloomy.

On the other hand, it is springtime in the church. Advent is a season of repentance as we prepare for Christmas, but it is also a season of anticipation, joy, and hope. There is almost a giddiness to this season, as we anticipate the coming of the king. It is like spring when the buds begin to appear on the trees and the first flowers begin to peak out of the ground. Even in the midst of winter, the first buds of spring begin to emerge.

I. We look forward to the salvation that Christ brings with anticipation.

He comes with grace. We look at the past year and see a lot of sin and failure in each of our lives. There are many things that we are ashamed of. Paul writes in today's epistle lesson, *“Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.”* But so often we have lived to service the desires of our sinful nature. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. The Bible is clear that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. But Jesus comes with grace. He is coming with forgiveness for you. Joseph was told, *“You are to give Him the name Jesus because He will save His people from their sins.”* He came into this world to bear all of our sins on the cross. Now He comes to bring us that forgiveness. He comes to each one of us personally in the world of absolution, “Your sins are forgiven.” Any other king would soon tire of pardoning his

subjects, but Jesus is the friend of sinners. He came to seek and to save the lost.

He comes with mercy. There are so many things in life, which suck the life out of us. Things are sometimes rocky with those whom we are close to. Other people are bitter enemies and do all that they can to destroy our lives. We have financial problems, health issues, and all kinds of things that could bring us to despair. Yet, Christ comes with a mighty hand. He hears our cries for mercy, and He comes to deliver us from all evil. He puts a barrier around His people, which the devil may not cross. He delivers us from so many evils and bring new blessings. He is even strong enough to turn the worst of things into good for His people.

I love how Paul Gerhardt's Advent hymn describes this part of the coming of the Lord:

**Rejoice, then, ye sad-hearted,
Who sit in deepest gloom,
Who mourn o'er joys departed
And tremble at your doom.
Despair not, He is near you,
yea standing at the door,
who best can help and cheer you
And bids you weep no more.**

In the midst of the darkness and gloom of this world, Christ comes with grace and mercy. It's springtime!

II. These gifts are what give us joy at this time of year.

We don't want to fall into the trap, that this time of year is about gifts that soon pass away. For decades there has been an attempt to make this season about buying and shopping, rather than about the coming of our Savior. It has even gotten to the point that people speak about "holiday gifts" rather than Christmas gifts. Stores entice us more with things that we want to buy for ourselves more than gifts that we want to give. All of this has led to the frenzies and violence that we see on Black Friday at several stores. Rather than a time of hope and anticipation, we have made it into the most stressful time of year. It sucks the life out of us.

On the other hand, our focus on Christ at this time of year, refreshes our lives.

We hear it in our songs. Compare the joy with the songs that we had at our Thanksgiving service to what it would have been like if you celebrated the day by watching football and going shopping. There was so much joy in the songs that we sang. What are your favorites Christmas carols? After a while songs like "Let it snow," "Have yourself a Merry Little Christmas," and Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer," start to get annoying, but our Advent hymns have that sense of anticipation until we get to many of our favorites songs such as "O Come all Ye Faithful," "Joy to the World," "Angels We have Heard on High" "Hark, the Herald Angel's Sing" or "Silent Night." What would this season be without those songs? The greatest of them all is Haendel's *Messiah*. I believe that every Christian should listen to the Messiah at least once in your life. Both the words and the music point us to God's great love in giving us the gift of His Son.

We have that refreshing in our preparations for the season. We decorate our homes and our church. The Advent wreath becomes brighter each week. There is so much joy when the Christmas tree goes up, and we feel a little blue when it comes back down. We go to concerts, Advent services, and special programs at this time of year. They all point to the reason for the season, which is our Savior Jesus Christ. Even the crowds and the bustle of this season cannot get us down, because we are celebrating the coming of the king.

Our joy in Christ even refreshes us in our daily work. No matter what we do, we are serving the Lord who came to save us. He gives new meaning to all of our work. The most menial task at work, our chores around the house, even our school work, all take on new meaning when we look to Jesus. We do them with joyful hearts with prayer and thanksgiving and a song in our hearts that we are serving the king who came to save us.

It's springtime! (You must all think that I'm nuts.) But it really is. When you think of what we are preparing to celebrate, we cannot help but sing "Hosanna," just like we do on Palm Sunday. The Lord is coming to save us. May this good news refresh our souls and give us the true joy and anticipation of the season in Christ.

Amen.

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