

THE KING OF PEACE AND GLORY

Luke 19:28-40

First Sunday in Advent (Series C)

December 2, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for the First Sunday in Advent comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 19, verses 28 through 40. It is on page 743 of the pew Bible. In this gospel lesson, Jesus delights his disciples, but also hints at something they won't like so much. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 19, beginning at verse 28, we read in Jesus' name.

²⁸ And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, "Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' you shall say this: 'The Lord has need of it.'" ³² So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³ And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying the colt?" ³⁴ And they said, "The Lord has need of it." ³⁵ And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." ⁴⁰ He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

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

Dear saints, your God and King comes to you. Think about that, and marvel at that. Your God and King comes to you. This is what the word "advent" means. It's just a fancy Latin word that means "coming." Our God—the King of peace and glory—comes down to us.

During the season of Advent we consider the three-fold coming of Jesus Christ. There are really three advents of Jesus Christ. The easiest way for us to remember them is as past, present, and future. And this only works for the era we're living in now. In Old Testament times, all three advents of Jesus would have been in the future. And in the new creation, all three advents will be in the past. But during the time in which we live, we can remember them as past, present, and future.

The past advent of Jesus is Christmas. During Advent we remember the incarnation—that is, the "enfleshment"—of the Son of God as the man Jesus of Nazareth. Our God and King came to earth in the form of a humble infant. This is Jesus' past advent.

The present advent of Jesus is in his Word and Sacraments. We receive Jesus, here and now, through these means that he has instituted. The risen Lord Jesus Christ has ascended into heaven, and he is now seated at the right hand of the Father, but that does not mean he is distant from us. In fact, he is as near to us as he ever has been. He comes near to us, and he even takes up residence within us, through his Word and Sacraments. This is especially noticeable in the Sacrament of the Altar, also called “The Lord’s Supper.” We Lutherans are kind of weird among our Protestant friends, because we believe Jesus was really serious when he said, “**This is my body**” (Matt. 26:26) and “**This is my blood**” (Matt. 26:28). According to Christ’s own words, the bread and wine do not *represent* Jesus’ body and blood; they *are* his body and blood. So erase any idea of symbolism from your minds. Scripture never speaks of the Lord’s Supper as a symbol. It always speaks of it as actually being the body and blood of Jesus Christ. So consider this at the altar today: Your God and King comes to you in these forms of bread and wine. And he comes to you, not merely spiritually, but also physically. This is the same kind of miracle that occurred when the Son of God became human in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The infinite and almighty God assumes the form of something small and humble. Your God and King comes to you, even today.

And the future advent of Jesus Christ is his glorious return on the Last Day, in which he will raise the dead and judge all mankind. As Christians this is our “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). Our hope and our glory—our reason for being Christians—is not really in this life. It is in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Sure, we have blessings in Jesus Christ now. Most significantly, we have peace with God, knowing that our sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. Furthermore, we have fellowship with God and with all the saints. We rejoice in these things, but we will also encounter various hardships in this life. Being a Christian might actually cause extra suffering in our lives. So we fix our eyes on the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ and the life to come. We look forward to the future advent of Jesus Christ. Our God and King will come again.

This theme of advent is one of the characteristics of Christianity that distinguishes it from every other religion of the world. It has often been observed—and I think this is accurate—that there are really only two religions in the world. There is the religion where God comes down to man; that’s Christianity. And there is the religion where man tries to ascend up to God; that’s every other form of religion in the world, including atheism and secular humanism.

It might sound kind of strange to categorize atheism and secular humanism as religions. They obviously don’t believe in a divine being, but they do have gods in the sense that they fear, love, and trust in something above everything else. And like every other false religion in the world, they seek to reach this god through human effort. Every person in the world is religious, even those who call themselves atheists or who say, “I’m spiritual but not religious.” Every person is religious in the sense that we value a certain person or thing above all others. And we trust that this person or thing can save us or bring us some kind of heaven on earth. The only question is who or what our god is, and can our god actually save us?

Every other religion of the world seeks to reach its god by some sort of human effort. Sometimes it’s moralism. That is, we try to reach up to our god by being good and moral. A lot of western religions like Islam or Mormonism focus on this. Sometimes it’s mysticism. That’s when we try to reach up to our god through some kind of spiritual experience, like

transcendental meditation. This is common among eastern religions like Buddhism or Hinduism. Other times we try to reach up to our god through rationalism. This is common in secular or atheist religion. If we can get everyone else in the world to think like us, then we can create some kind of utopia or a heaven on earth. Most organized religions—whether they're western or eastern—really combine all three of these: moralism, mysticism, and rationalism.

Every other religion of the world has a slightly different idea of their god or their approach to him, but they all have this in common: they have to reach up to him. Moralism, mysticism, and rationalism are all ladders to ascend up to their god.

But Christianity is radically different. Our God comes down to us. And I don't think any human being would ever think of this. It's just not in our nature. That's why Christianity is so unique. Natural religion seeks to climb up to its god or reach up and pull him down. But supernatural religion is where God comes down. Everything is reversed.

So think about this, and marvel at this during the season of Advent. Our God comes down to us. Instead of us seeking and finding him, he seeks and finds us. After all, God is not the one who's lost; we are.

Our God and King comes down to us. This might seem like a frightful thing, to suddenly be in the presence of God. In those old westerns where some cowboy says, "Prepare to meet your maker," that's not a word of comfort. And when the prophet Amos says, "Prepare to meet your God" (4:12), it is not a word of Gospel. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:11).

But before we cower in fear, or before we turn tail and run—because there is no way to escape God anyway—we should peek and see how he comes to us. Does he come in condemnation? Or does he come with salvation?

The gospel lesson of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem reveals the nature of his coming. He rides into Jerusalem on a small donkey while the multitude of his disciples proclaim his praises.

There's something joyful and exciting about this. Whenever Jesus comes, it is always appropriate for God's people to rejoice. With each of the three advents I mentioned earlier, there is great joy. And in this scene of Jesus coming into Jerusalem, "the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice" (19:37). And when the text talks about "the whole multitude of his disciples," this is way more than just the twelve. The term "disciple" often includes many more people. The whole crowd probably included several hundred people, perhaps even thousands. Some of these had joined Jesus' train as he travelled to Jerusalem for the Passover. Others were already in Jerusalem and were waiting for Jesus to arrive. The owners of the colt were probably among them. And when the disciples in Jerusalem hear that Jesus is drawing near, they go out to meet him.

So there's really a large crowd, and they're all rejoicing and praising God. Everyone except for the Pharisees, who don't think Jesus should let them make such a big deal of him. Perhaps they don't think any human is worthy of such praise. Or, perhaps more likely, they are afraid the Romans will take notice and consider this to be some kind of uprising. So they tell Jesus to rebuke his disciples. But Jesus says, "If these were silent, the very stones would cry out"

(19:40). The idea is that this praise is justified, even necessary for such an occasion. Jesus, the King of peace and glory, is coming to the city that has been sanctified for his sacrifice.

So it really is an occasion for rejoicing. But there's something odd about it as well. There is a strange, perhaps even comical, humility about it, because Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a little donkey colt. It's not the typical way for a king to enter his royal city. You would expect a glorious king to ride in on a majestic warhorse. An elephant would work too. Even a mule or an ox would be better than a donkey. But Jesus specifically asks for a donkey, and not a full-size donkey either; he wants a little one on which no one has ever sat.

Part of the reason for this is that it fulfills the prophecy of Zechariah, which we heard at the start of the service.

“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you;
righteous and having salvation is he,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey” (Zech. 9:9).

So Jesus fulfills prophecy, and he knows he's doing this. He specifically does this to fulfill the prophecy. But there's more to it than that. The prophecy was made this way for a reason. It was made this way, because it reveals the character of Jesus. Jesus truly is humble.

Now when we say that he's humble, we don't just mean that he acts lowlier than he rightly deserves. It's not like the polite humility we see when someone who is really quite awesome talks themselves down—like when they interview the star of the game, and he says, “It was really a team effort.” That's the kind of humility we like to see in our heroes, but Jesus' humility is quite different. The humility Jesus demonstrates goes far beyond words. Jesus' humility means that he actually considers others more significant than himself (Phil. 2:3), and his actions demonstrate this. He doesn't talk himself down. He actually talks himself up. If you interview Jesus at the end of the game, he'll come right out and tell you how awesome he is. He does it over and over again. He claims to be God in human flesh. He says that if these disciples didn't shout his praises, the stones would cry out. That's big talk. But Jesus demonstrates his humility by his actions when he takes my place and your place on the cursed tree.

So the donkey is quite appropriate for him when we consider what he is going to Jerusalem to do. He is not going there to overthrow the tyrannical Roman occupation. He is going there to die for the sins of the world. Jesus is going there to stand in our place—really to hang in our place—and make peace with God in heaven.

This is what the crowd proclaims about Jesus. And this is really interesting.

All four of the gospels record this event of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, but they all record it slightly differently. Now, when I say that they're all different, I don't mean that they can't get the story straight. They're all true, but they each record different parts of it. And this is what we should expect from real, historical narratives. None of them record every single word that was spoken by every person in attendance. So they all have the multitude saying something slightly different. Luke is the only one who records them proclaiming, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest” (19:38). This is one of Luke's unique contributions. I'll give you extra credit if you can

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think of what that is supposed to remind us of. "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest."
What does that sound like?

It reminds us of a scene earlier in Luke, where a multitude of angels proclaimed Jesus' birth to the shepherds,

"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (2:14)

And it's no coincidence that both of these are in *The Gospel of Luke*. I'm convinced that Luke does this on purpose. But there's a little bit of a difference between what the angels say at his birth and what the multitude of disciples say at his entrance into Jerusalem. Both proclaim glory in the highest. And both proclaim peace. But there's a subtle difference. At his birth, the angels proclaim peace on *earth*. At the triumphal entry, it's peace in *heaven*.

At Christmas the emphasis is peace on earth, because God came down to earth, and he did it peacefully. But he goes to the cross now to make peace in heaven. Christmas isn't complete without Good Friday and Easter. For God to come down and not offer himself as a sacrifice would do nothing for us and for our salvation. He must also make peace in heaven, and he does this by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:20). He comes with salvation, because he goes to the cross. And this is his glory.

Dear saints, the king of peace and glory comes to you. He comes now with the salvation he earned for you by his death and resurrection. He has made peace in heaven between God the Father and you. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.