

PEACE IN HEAVEN

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 he 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. This is the nature of Christianity.

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.

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 the means 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 dwells within us, through his Word and Sacraments. This is especially noticeable in the Lord's Supper. We

Lutherans kind of stick out among our Protestant friends, because we believe Jesus was actually 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 when we receive communion next Sunday: Your God and King comes to you in the 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. And he does it in order to come to you.

And the future advent of Jesus Christ is his glorious return on the Last Day. Jesus is coming back. He will raise the dead. He will judge all mankind. He will transform his believing saints and bring them into everlasting life. He will also condemn unbelievers and cast them into everlasting contempt. As Christians the return of Jesus 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. 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.

And I don’t just mean other organized or creedal religions, like Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, etc. Atheism and secular humanism are actually quite religious. Politics is more religious than most religions. The two most popular religions in America are probably Democrat and Republican. What do we fear? What do we love? What do we trust? It’s a First Commandment issue. That’s the one where the LORD says, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7). To have a god means that we fear, love, and trust in something above everything else. So what do we really fear, love, and trust in above all things?

Every person in the world is religious. It’s unavoidable. Every person is religious in the sense that we value a certain person or thing above all others. When we are suffering, where do we look for help? When we see evil and injustice in the world, who do we expect to do something about it? And we trust that this person or thing can save us or establish some kind of heaven on earth. The issue is who or what our god is, and can our god actually save us?

Every other religion of the world seeks to reach it’s god by human effort. And they seek this in three basic ways: moralism, mysticism, and rationalism. We could call these the three broken ladders of religion. Sometimes it’s moralism. That is, we try to climb up to our god by being good. Sometimes it’s mysticism. That’s when we try to reach up to our god through a spiritual experience. Other times we try to reach up to our god through our intellect. This is rationalism. The best word for it these days might be “wokeness.” The word “woke” is usually used to make fun of people on the left. But I see a “wokeness” on the right as well. It’s the same form of religion, but with different ideas. It’s when you “get it,” and the other people in your tribe “get it,” but the people on the other side are ignorant and unenlightened. If we can get everyone else in the world to think like us, then we’ll have peace, justice, and prosperity. This is the rationalistic religion of politics.

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The humanistic or political forms of religion are usually religions of the mind, and they often have some moralism mixed in as well. Most organized religions combine all three of the broken ladders: 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 or raise humanity to a new level.

But Christianity is fundamentally 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. But supernatural religion is where God comes down. Everything is reversed.

And this can only happen in a religion that's true. And now I'm speaking especially of those religions that worship a deity. False gods don't come down. They can't, because they're not real. In false religion, the participants have to do all the moving. But in the true religion, the one true God does the moving. Only the true God can come down, because then he has to actually prove himself to be true. Jesus did this in his ministry, and especially in his resurrection. He proved himself. You see why the false religions have gods who don't come down. You have to be real in order to come down. So in the true religion, everything is reversed.

So think about this, and marvel at this during the season of Advent. Our God comes down to us. This is part of what it means that we are saved by grace. 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's also 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, we should peek and see how he comes to us. Does he come in condemnation? Or does he come with salvation?

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). 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 does it on purpose. 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.

But he’s not humble in an “Aww, shucks,” self-deprecating kind of way. That’s usually a false form of humility. That’s when we just pretend to be humble. But Jesus talks himself up. He claims to be God in human flesh. He says that if his disciples didn’t shout his praises, the stones would cry out. There is no false humility here. But Jesus is humble in the sense that he actually considers others more significant than himself (Phil. 2:3), and his actions demonstrate this. But Jesus demonstrates his humility by his actions when he takes your place on the cursed tree. He talks himself up, and then he treats you like you are more important than he is.

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 goes there in humility 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 crowds proclaim 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.

Police officers will tell you that, if you interview four different people, and they all say the same thing, word for word, they are almost certainly lying. But if they give you the same story, with a few differences or an added detail here and there, you’re probably getting the truth.

That’s how it is with the four gospels. And the triumphal entry is a good example of this. They each have different details they add, and their quotations vary a little.

Consider how each of them record the words of the crowd. Notice how they are all similar, but not identical. And this is to be expected, especially when you’re quoting a crowd. One author might record what’s said in one section at one moment, and another author records the words

from another section at another moment. But the crowd is also praising Jesus together, so there will be a lot of similarity.

In Matthew, the crowds shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (21:9).

In Mark they shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David! Hosanna in the highest!” (11:9-10).

In John they took palm branches and cried out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” (12:13).

Luke has the most difference. Here the multitude says, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (19:38).

They all bless Jesus for coming “in the name of the Lord.” All of them, except Luke, use the word “Hosanna!” And they all identify Jesus as a king. Matthew does this by calling Jesus “the Son of David.” The other three use the words “king” or “kingdom.” So they all have similarities, but also a few differences. The biggest difference is from Luke, and this is what I find fascinating about Luke’s account. Instead of saying, “Hosanna in the highest,” he has, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” And if you listen carefully, that’s kind of a familiar phrase, especially if you’ve started your Christmas preparations already. Listen to it again: “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”

It reminds us of the scene earlier in Luke, where a multitude of angels proclaimed Jesus’ birth to the shepherds. They said,

“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*. 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, the disciples proclaim peace in *heaven*.

There’s a reason for this change. At Christmas the emphasis is peace on earth, because God came down to earth, and he did it peacefully. But then he goes to the cross 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). Jesus did not come down simply for the sake of being down. He came down to lift us up.

So when he comes down to earth it’s “peace on earth.” And when he goes to the cross it’s “peace in heaven.” He comes down to take us to where he is.

Remember the three advents of Jesus Christ. He came to earth peacefully, in order to go to the cross and make peace in heaven. He comes to you now with that peace, so that when he comes again on the Last Day, he will carry you into that perfect peace forever. Amen.

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