THE ADVENT OF THE CHRIST

Matthew 21:1-11
First Sunday in Advent (Series A)
November 30, 2025
Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND
Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 21, verses 1 through 11. In addition to this, we will also consider what God revealed in the Old Testament and epistle lesson. In this gospel lesson, Jesus reveals himself to be the humble king who comes to save those who long for him. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Matthew 21, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

> **1** Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives,
> then Jesus sent two disciples, **2** 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. **3** If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will
> send them at once." **4** This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,
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> **5** "Say to the daughter of Zion,
> 'Behold, your king is coming to you,
> humble, and mounted on a donkey,
> on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.' "
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> **6** The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. **7** They brought the donkey and
> the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. **8** Most of the crowd spread their
> cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.
> **9** 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!" **10** And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who
> is this?" **11** And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

Blessed Lord, You have caused all Holy Scriptures to be written for our learning. Grant that we may so hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them that, by patience and comfort of Your holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

You may be seated.

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

A blessed Advent to all of you. May these next few weeks be a time of repentance, meditation on the Scriptures, and prayer. My hope for you is that you would not get caught up in the busy-ness of Christmas preparation, and that you would not have to endure hearing "Santa Baby" forty-seven times, but that these four weeks would be a time of repentance, spiritual refreshment, and anticipation for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The world celebrates a sort of pre-Christmas, which is filled with online shopping, baking, in-store shopping, decorating, and last-minute shopping. None of these things are necessarily bad. There is a time and a place for them, but in moderation. Ask yourself, "What is truly necessary to prepare for Christmas?" In order to answer that question, we first need to ask and answer, "What is Christmas?" Is it a party of food and gifts? Or is it the coming of the Son of

God to earth? How we answer that, or which of those two we identify as being truly essential, will dictate how we prepare. Prepare your hearts. Preparing a table or a tree is optional. When Jesus came to earth, no one prepared a feast. They didn't even prepare a bed. Gifts were few, from far away, and a year or two late. But those who were looking for the Kingdom of God received the Christ with joy and faith.

So prepare your hearts by reading Scripture, praying, and confessing your sins. As for music, I would encourage you to find some sacred music, perhaps even Advent music. It exists. The world's Christmas music, the kind that has nothing to do with Christ, mostly just pretends that everything is merry and bright. The days are getting shorter. We are approaching the darkest and coldest time of year. So what's our solution? To pretend that we're happy. That's a good way to make us all depressed. Instead of trying to lift ourselves out of darkness, repent. Confess your sins. As the days get shorter, darker, and colder, take that as our annual reminder that this world is coming to an end, and we must be ready to meet our Lord. This Advent, humble yourselves before the Lord. Then, he will do something we cannot; he will exalt you (James 4:10; 1 Peter 5:6). Whenever we try to exalt ourselves, we are humbled. Whenever we pretend to be happy, we fall deeper into despair. But whenever we humble ourselves before God, he lifts us up. So just tell the truth. Be honest with God about your sin, about your troubles, and about the darkness we see in this world. And see what he will do.

During this season, we consider the three advents of Christ. "Advent" is a fancy Latin word that means "coming." So during Advent we consider the three comings of Christ. We consider the nature of these three advents. We consider what Jesus comes to do in them. We consider our preparation and response to encountering the King of Heaven and Earth. And we especially consider this King: what he is like and how he is disposed toward us.

Advent isn't quite Christmas, but it shares some similarity. The first advent of the Christ is his birth by the Virgin Mary at Christmas. The eternal and omnipotent Son of God assumed human flesh in the Virgin Mary. The angel Gabriel announced this great blessing to Mary, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Son of God took on the smallest form of humanity. Mary was not wealthy. Nor was Joseph, her betrothed husband-to-be. He was a working man of humble means. And this is the family that God chose to come to, in order to show that the King of Heaven and earth does not come for the elites of this world, but for the humble. He grew up mostly in Nazareth, which was considered something of a backwater town, even for Galilee, which was not as influential as Judea and its holy city, Jerusalem. He suffered and died the humblest of all deaths, being condemned as a criminal and executed by the state. He humbled himself to the lowest place in order to take our sins upon himself and, by the exaltation of his resurrection, lift us to eternal life with him. This is his first advent.

The second advent is the one we might overlook sometimes, because it is not visible like the first and last. It is his coming to us through the Word and Sacraments. It is his continual presence with his Church. Though he ascended, he promised to be with us always (Matt. 28:20). He said, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them" (Matt. 18:20). We gather in Jesus' Name, specifically, when we gather to listen to Jesus' Word and share in the Sacraments. This promise also holds true when you read the Word in your homes. The Word made flesh still comes to us through his Word. In Baptism, he joins us to himself in his death and resurrection, so that we receive the benefits of his death and life. He forgives all who confess their sin to him. And he has promised that bread and wine, according to his words, are truly his body and blood, so that we who eat and drink receive the forgiveness and life he accomplished

when his body was broken and his blood poured out. This is his second or middle advent. Jesus comes to you now with forgiveness and peace.

The third or final advent is often called his Second Coming, because it is the second time he appears in visible form. It is his great appearing on the Last Day, when he descends on a cloud in great glory. The dead will be raised. He will send his angels to gather his elect from around the world. He will judge the living and the dead, for all will be raised. God's saints will be transformed after the perfect image of Jesus. And he will bring his redeemed people into the new creation, which he has prepared for his bride, the Church. That will be his final advent, and we will always be with the Lord.

These three advents inform Christian piety during this season, and not just this season, but for our entire lives. Because of Jesus' first advent to atone for sin, in recognition of his presence with us now, and in anticipation of his glorious appearance on the Last Day, we bow in repentance, confessing our sins. We know that he atoned for sin. We have confidence that he forgives all who confess now. And we look for our blessed hope on the Last Day.

In the Old Testament lesson, the prophet Isaiah teaches us to anticipate the justice and peace that characterizes the Kingdom of Jesus. This is the Kingdom we are looking for when Jesus appears in glory.

> "They shall beat their swords into plowshares,
> and their spears into pruning hooks;
> nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
> neither shall they learn war anymore" (Is. 2:4).

The dream of this Kingdom is written on the hearts of man, even on unbelievers. How many idealists have dreamt of this peace on earth? Even unbelievers dream of this, revealing that God has written eternity into man's heart (Eccl. 3:11). And the eternity Scripture speaks of does not merely mean the length of time, but the peace and justice of the Christ's eternal Kingdom. Though we have never seen it, and we will not see it on this earth, the heart of man is built to long for this perfect peace and justice, where men do not lift weapons against each other anymore. But the same idealistic men who dream of this peace on earth also lift weapons to try to establish this peace. The greatest mass murderers in the history of the world have dreamt of this perfect society, and they have killed millions in the pursuit of it. We all dream of it, and we all want it, but sinful man cannot establish it. Only the Christ can bring it, so we look for the coming of his Kingdom.

In the epistle lesson from Romans 13, the apostle Paul teaches us how we should live while we wait for the appearance of this Kingdom. The time is coming. We do not know when. But as surely as Jesus died and rose again, he will appear again in glory. As we anticpate the appearance of our King and the coming of his Kingdom, we should walk in love.

And Paul defines love as keeping the commandments of God:

> "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,' and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. 13:8-10).

"Love" is the summary of all the commandments. The world confuses this by teaching that love replaces the commandments, and then it defines love in a way that allows for breaking the commandments. But that is the opposite of Paul's point. Love never contradicts the commands of God, and the commands of God are never against love. If love is the summary of the Law, then the Law is the expansion of love. Without the commandments, we would define love in whatever way suits our selfish desires. This brings darkness, not light. It causes injury, not peace. But God's commandments give content to love.

Do you want to know how to love your neighbor? Honor your father and mother, even all authorities. Do not murder your neighbor or cause him any bodily harm. Do not commit adultery with your neighbor, nor against your neighbor. Do not take what belongs to your neighbor, nor defraud him of anything God has given to him. Do not lie to your neighbor, nor lie about him, nor defame his reputation in any way. Do not even covet anything that belongs to your neighbor, because your coveting robs you of contentment and leads to sins of word and deed against your neighbor. Love your neighbor as God intends by keeping his commandments. In this way we bear fruit in keeping with repentance, and we show that we are looking for the Christ's Kingdom of peace and justice.

In the gospel lesson, our Lord Jesus reveals what sort of king he is. This is his entrance into Jerusalem on the Sunday before his Passion. We often call it "Palm Sunday," because John tells us that the people greeted Jesus with palm branches (John 12:13). It was his grand, but humble entrance into Jerusalem just five days before he offered his life for us on a cross.

The reading might seem out of place during Advent instead of Lent, but it reveals the nature of Christ's coming. It is both humble and glorious at the same time. It especially reminds us what the purpose was of Christ's first Advent. It was not to be worshipped and adored, but to be hated and killed.

He sent his disciples to fetch a donkey and her colt. They find them, just as Jesus told them, and brought them back to Jesus. Matthew is the only gospel to mention both the donkey and the colt. The other three gospels only mention the colt, because the colt is the one Jesus actually rode, which seems very odd. Here you have two donkeys: an adult mother and her colt. People don't usually ride donkeys, but if you have a choice between an adult and a colt, you would choose the adult. But Jesus chose the colt. Why?

It fulfills the prophecy from Zechariah:

> "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).

As the prophecy states, it reveals the humble nature of Jesus. There's something glorious about the scene as well. For one thing, Jesus knows the prophecy, and he knows that at least most of the Jews also knew it. By choosing to fulfill this prophecy, he is declaring himself to be the King of Israel, and he knows that the crowds will understand it as such. He also accepts their praise as they shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (21:9). There is something undeniably glorious about the way Jesus presents himself. And he certainly means to draw attention to himself.

But the point of that attention is to reveal what kind of King he is. He is not the tyrannical type. He does not extract service or payment from his subjects. He does not draft them to go and fight a war for him. He is the Servant King. He comes in humility. He comes to serve his dear people. He subjects himself to the sentence of death for the sake of them. He does not fight other men to claim his Kingdom. But he fights and defeats the devil to take away the power of death. He purchases his Kingdom "with His holy and precious blood and with His innocent sufferings and death" (Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*, "The Apostles' Creed").

Dear children of God, this is your King. He gave himself for you, and he rose to live and reign forever as your King. His Kingdom is justice and peace. As he came once to make you his own, he will come again to take you into his eternal Kingdom.

We dream of justice and peace, but we live in a world of violence and sin. We would like to think that we are above this, that the problem is everyone else. But that same darkness dwells in our hearts. So turn in repentance to the Christ. Confess your sins. Humble yourselves before him. Walk in love. And look for the appearance of his glorious Kingdom. "We are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3:13). You are made citizens, through the blood of Jesus. Amen.

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