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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

First Sunday in Advent (Series A)

November 27, 2016

Text: Matthew 21:1–11

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

Have you heard any children say “I can’t wait for Christmas!” I have. But I won’t give any hints as to which children said those universal words of hope and anticipation. But you have to love the exuberant anticipation of children hoping for good things to come. We could learn a thing or two from this child-like anticipation. That’s one way to look at this Advent season. It’s a time in which our anticipation grows. For something good is coming, something is “adventing.” Or maybe it would be better to say that someone is coming. And that’s why our joyful anticipation grows.

God’s people have always lived in a sense of great anticipation. We hear it in the OT reading from Isaiah 2:2–3. Hear these words like a child anticipating a great event:

²It 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, ³and 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.”

This great event will happen in the latter days. The house of the Lord will be established, high and lifted up upon a tall mountain. All the peoples and nations of the earth shall flow up to this house on a high hill. There’s a marvelous mystery in how the nations are described. They are like a river flowing to its source, its ultimate destination. But contrary to the normal laws of creation, this river of humanity flows up to the house of the Lord. The Lord Himself is drawing all people unto Himself.

What’s anticipated in this flowing up of all nations is described in the following verses (3–4):

- The word of the Lord will be taught by the Lord Himself.
- All disputes are settled in absolute, perfect righteousness; no more extortion, thievery, crime, or litigation; the Lord Himself will preside as judge.

- Peace, lasting peace, is finally established as the weapons of warfare (swords & spears) are refashioned into instruments of peace and prosperity (plowshares, pruning hooks); the nations no longer study the art of war for nation shall no longer rise against nation in jealousy and bloodshed.

Peace, righteousness, justice, and prosperity. No wonder the prophet concludes with a joyful admonition in vs. 5, “O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.” Come on saints of God, let us walk in the light of the Lord as we wait in joyful anticipation of greater things to come! He is coming! The Lord and Savior, Himself, is coming!

This kind of “can’t wait” anticipation isn’t an isolated occurrence in the Scriptures. Today’s Gospel reading (Matt 21:5) cites the prophet Zechariah (9:9), “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.’” In this prophecy, the King of kings and Lord of lords is coming to Jerusalem, the beloved daughter of Zion. God’s people have been earnestly anticipating the arrival of their kingly Messiah for centuries upon centuries. Year after year the anticipation grew....when will He come?

And why should such a King generate such longing and anticipation? Matthew doesn’t quote the subsequent verses from Zechariah’s prophecy. But here’s why they longed for this king (vs. 10–12):

- World-wide peace and prosperity; the King shall speak peace to the nations and rule from sea to sea, to the ends of the earth (vs. 10);
- The King’s eternal covenant of eternal life will be established with His people through His own blood (vs. 11); and
- The King shall set prisoners free (vs. 11) and their lost fortunes, stolen from them by the enemies of goodness, truth, and righteousness, will be restored double (vs. 12).

When this King comes, universal peace and prosperity established in justice and equity will thrive among God’s people forever. All that has been lost due to sin and death and evil will be restored double! No wonder God’s people kept saying, “I can’t wait! The King is coming!”

That’s the kind of I can’t-wait attitude that was pulsing through the crowd as Jesus was entering into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. The promises of Isaiah 2 and the

Zechariah 9 come crashing to their fulfillment in this Jesus of Nazareth as He enters into Jerusalem. Matthew 21 is saturated in the OT witness that all the promises of this faithful, long-awaited King are coming to their completion in Jesus.

As already mentioned, Zechariah the prophet is cited. Jesus rides on a borrowed donkey like kings of old. The crowd gathered palm branches, symbols of royal victory and triumph, to wave in celebration as Jesus enters the holy city. And they shout words from Psalm 118:25–26, “Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” This was a royal enthronement psalm sung when the king was coming to his royal throne.

Make no mistake about it. The King of kings and Lord of lords is coming to His throne in Jerusalem. There, in that ancient city, He will establish His kingdom and begin His eternal reign. And Matthew writes that the entire city “was stirred up” (vs. 10). The time of waiting is over. The King is come.

We know what happens next. On Friday of that week, Good Friday, King Jesus is crucified. Officially, He is executed for the crime of being the King of the Jews. So stated the inscription posted on the cross above His head: Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews. Our Lord’s disciples didn’t anticipate this even though Zechariah’s prophecy said that prisoners were set free because the “blood of my covenant with you.” The blood of the new covenant flowing from the body of the King Himself.

For centuries, God’s people waited and longed for the coming of the King. But they didn’t expect a crucified King who would rise from the dead. Give us peace, prosperity, release from captivity, the two-fold restoration of all things. We long for those promises. But must those promised blessings come through the suffering, death, and resurrection of the King of kings? Yes, they must.

The Palm Sunday account of our Lord’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem always begins the Advent season. It’s a powerful reminder of why Christmas is so important and joyous. The baby born in Bethlehem is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the one all creation has been waiting for since Adam and Eve’s original sin. This divine King was born for the purpose of entering Jerusalem so that He could die and rise again to give life to the world.

Make no mistake about this dear saints of God. King Jesus entered Jerusalem as a conquering King. To be sure, He was clothed in humility. He rode a donkey, an

animal of peace. It was borrowed from strangers. Our Lord bore no weapons of warfare and had no legions of conquering soldiers behind Him. On Friday, He died the lowest death imaginable. Even the tomb in which Jesus was buried was borrowed.

King Jesus was born humbly in Bethlehem, birthplace of King David. King Jesus died in humility in Jerusalem, capital of all Jewish kings. The great mystery and wonder that stands before us today and the rest of the Advent Season is that this humble King conquers the most powerful enemies of sin, death, Satan and all his evil horde by the humble means of death and resurrection.

And that death and resurrection into which we are baptized with humble water sanctified in God's Holy name remains the means of our victory unto eternal life. All that we long for is found in this humble King who died, yet lives and reigns so that we might be justified heirs and inheritors of His glorious kingdom.

King Jesus rides into Jerusalem to win a kingdom for you and me and all His people. The blood of His covenant by which He sets captives free, establishes peace and prosperity among the nations, by which He teaches us His holy Word, and which settles all disputes was poured out on Calvary's cross. That blood of the New Testament comes to us in the blood of His Supper given to us this day and each Lord's Day.

Amen. Come King Jesus and reign among us with Your joy, peace, prosperity, and forgiveness. Prepare us to see Your glorious face when You return on the Last Day. For that day, we can't wait. Come...come, Lord Jesus.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.