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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY
First Sunday in Advent
November 29, 2015
Text: Luke 19:28–40

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

It's hard to believe but a new church year begins today. That's right! Today is New Year's Day, at least, liturgically speaking. Advent is the beginning the church's calendar in which we will especially pay attention to the great deeds and salvific wonders performed by the Savior Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. We will trace the Lord's earthly life from the preparations for His birth in Bethlehem (Advent and Christmas), through His revelation as the Savior of the nations (Epiphany), through the battle He waged and won with Satan and evil (Lent), through His Last Supper, triumphant death, glorious resurrection, and many post-resurrection appearances (Holy Week and Easter), through His ascension to the Father's right hand and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. For the next 6 months, our Lord's life, what He did and accomplished, will provide the structure of our worship services. It will be a beautiful and glorious time of worship, praise, and rejoicing in the victories promised to us as God's redeemed people.

Our liturgical New Year begins with what looks like an odd place: the Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. These events begin Holy Week, Palm Sunday in fact. Shouldn't we begin the New Year with the events leading up to the Lord's birth? Maybe John the Baptist? We'll cover that over the next couple of weeks.

The church's liturgical calendar doesn't follow a slavish chronology; it's not a history lesson. This event then this event then this event. It paints a much more beautiful and powerful picture of who Jesus is and what He did for the redemption of the world. The first Sunday in Advent and its use of the Jesus' triumphal entry sets the tone for the next 6 months as it confronts us with questions like: Who is Jesus? What did He come to do? And why should we even care 2,000 years later?

Those are the three questions we will consider today: Who is Jesus? What did He come to do? And why is it important to us today. Keep in mind, the answers will help us understand better what's going to take place in our worship services over the next 6

months. They are eternal answers that inform and give substance to our eternal destiny in the glories of heaven.

We begin with “Who is Jesus?” Luke answers that question in two different ways. The first is direct; the second is more subtle, but no less powerful. We begin with the more subtle answer as portrayed in the acquisition of a colt, a young donkey upon which no one had yet sat. To us moderns, such a detail is curious at best. But not to a first century Jewish audience. They would have immediately understood the historic connections to past kings of Israel, specifically, King Solomon (c.p. I Kings 1:33). By riding a donkey, the animal Middle Eastern kings rode when returning in peace, into Jerusalem, the literal and spiritual capital of Judaism, Jesus is declaring Himself to be the King of Israel. Who is Jesus? He is a King, the King of Israel entering into the royal city in peace.

The more direct answer comes in the form of the crowd shouting out Psalm 118:26, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” as Jesus enters into Jerusalem on His royal beast (Lk 19:38a). Nothing could be clearer. Jesus is a king, the King of Israel entering into His royal city upon a royal beast of peace in order to rule and reign over His kingdom.

But Luke adds more. For Jesus is not simply another king in a long line of kings. Jesus is the “Lord.” Twice Luke says Jesus is the “Lord who has need of it (i.e., colt)” (vs. 31 & 34). And just in case we missed it, Luke adds another qualified describing Israel’s king. It’s found in 38b, “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” This divine King, riding upon a beast of peace, enters Jerusalem and by so doing, brings peace to heaven and glory in the highest. No other of Israel’s kings was said to bring peace to heaven. Only Jesus, the divine king of Israel.

And this claim that Jesus brings peace to heaven is all the more amazing when you contrast these words of praise with the angelic chorus at Jesus’ birth. That heavenly ensemble sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” (Lk 2:14). Notice this amazing contrast!! The citizens of heaven, the angels, proclaim that Jesus brings peace to earth. The citizens of earth, the crowd outside Jerusalem, proclaim that Jesus brings peace to heaven. Both declare that Jesus brings the highest glory to heaven and earth!! This is Israel’s king that brings peace to heaven and earth. Only a divine, Lordly king can do that. This is the divine, eternal King, not only of Israel, but of heaven and earth! Remember Jesus’ amazing identity when we consider Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, His baptism in the

Jordan River, His battle with Satan in the desert, His Last Supper, His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand. In all that He does, He is the universal King that brings peace to heaven and earth!!

The second question is, "What did He come to do?" The answer to this question is intimately bound up with Jesus' identity, the divine King of heaven and earth. As we've already said, King Jesus brought peace to heaven and earth. Such an assertion assumes that heaven and earth had not been at peace with each other. And that, in fact, was the case. Man's sin and rebellion against God brought discord and strife and outright hostility. Such is the description the Bible gives. Listen to the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:14–18:

¹⁴For (Jesus) is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ... ¹⁶and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. ¹⁷And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

Before the coming of King Jesus, heaven and earth were in a constant state of hostility; there was no peace except through the promises of a coming Savior. Through the cross, however, peace was restored to heaven and earth. And that's the touchstone with today's gospel reading. Jesus rides into Jerusalem that He might die on the cross and rise again. By so doing, He accomplishes His divine mission: to bring peace to heaven and earth. The war between heaven and earth is over; they are reconciled because of King Jesus and what He did in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Good Friday, and Easter.

Finally, we arrive at our third question. Why should we care about these things 2,000 years after their conclusion? Before the coming of Jesus, heaven and earth were in a state of perpetual conflict. Now that Jesus died and has risen from dead, heaven and earth are reconciled and at peace. Through faith in Jesus, we participate in that universal, divine peace. All other efforts to live in peace with God and man will, at best, be temporary. The only lasting peace that can be found in heaven or on earth resides in Jesus. That's why it's important for us today, 2,000 years later.

The earthly peace proclaimed to shepherds on that first Christmas, the heavenly peace celebrated on Palm Sunday is found exclusively in King Jesus, the Lord over all creation. Through faith in Him, you stand at peace with God the Father and reconciled to all humanity. Or to put it differently, through Jesus you are at peace with heaven

and earth. All is restored. You are reconciled to all creation and the author of creation. For you are baptized into Christ Jesus and all that He is and does for the salvation of the universe.

Having been redeemed in Christ, you can participate in the praise and celebration of all creation. Look back at Luke 19:39–40. The Pharisees didn't care much for the crowd's jubilant celebration. They asked Jesus to silence the crowd. To which our Lord makes this most intriguing reply, "I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out."

On that great day, all creation was receiving her Lord and King as He rode into the holy city to win for Himself His kingdom. One reason why these things are still important for us today, 2,000 years later, is that we are invited to join in creation's worship of the universe's king. Humanity is the representative head over all creation. Mark's gospel ends with Jesus commissioning the disciples to preach the gospel to all creation. We believers in Jesus are the worship leaders directing the praise of all creation. The saving gospel of King Jesus is an announcement and invitation to join in His victory and triumph.

Jesus is the divine King over all creation. Through His life, death, and resurrection, He brought peace to war-torn universe. And that promised peace is here for us today and for all eternity. A blessed New Year to you all!

✠ 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.