

29 November 2009
Advent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Advent Joy”

Text: Luke 19:28-40 (Jeremiah 33:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13)

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

The church is never quite so counter-cultural as she is at this time of the year, the season of Advent. While the world is jumping into Christmas with both feet, the church says *wait*. While the world cries “joy!” the church cries “repent!” And while the world feasts, the church fasts. And so the church seems a bit backwards and out of step. Even we in the church often really don’t get it. I remember when I was little, asking my pastor why we didn’t sing Christmas carols in December. He told me: *because it’s not Christmas yet; it’s Advent*. I didn’t understand, and many today don’t understand either. The season of Advent just doesn’t seem to fit. It’s the church’s square peg in the world’s round holiday hole.

And that, my friends, is a good thing!

It’s a good thing, for such an Advent reminds us that there’s something more; that this world and life are not our final destination; that as children of God, we *shouldn’t* feel comfortable in a world of sin and satisfied with what we have now; and that the only true and lasting joy possible in this age is repentant joy. The joy that comes with the forgiveness of our sins; the joy that comes in not having to pretend that we are something we are not; the joy that comes as our Lord comes to us with His life and salvation.

And so Advent joy is a different kind of joy. It is the joy not of wishes granted, but of the promise of God fulfilled. And we heard of such joy this morning as we heard of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But we must consider carefully this story, and where this true joy is to be found.

The first place we might look is to the crowd, for they were crying out to Jesus in joy as He entered Jerusalem: **“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”** Did you ever wonder whose joyous voices filled the crowd that day? Luke tells us it was **“the whole multitude of his disciples.”** But who is that? Certainly the twelve, but many more than that. Maybe Lazarus was there, fresh from the tomb. Or formerly-blind Bartimaeus, whose now-opened-eyes were beholding Jerusalem for the very first time. Maybe

there were former lepers, reveling at being jostled by a crowd they weren't allowed to be in before. Or perhaps the paralyzed man who had never walked was now dancing before his King. And who else? How many had Jesus healed? How many lives had Jesus touched?

Why were they so joyous? Because they knew from whence they came. They knew the reality of sin. They lived it. The deformity. The helplessness. Being an outcast. Not the same as everyone else. Abnormal. Too much trouble. They daily experienced the wretchedness of sin . . . and Jesus had raised them, healed them, given them life again. And truly, that is a reason to rejoice.

But we cannot stop there. For while we *have* found joy, we have not yet found the Advent joy. There is another joy to behold in this story. A hidden joy. For while each person in that rejoicing crowd that day knew, and in their own small way, had tasted the poison of sin, there was only One that day who really and fully knew the true depth and horror of sin - and that was the One riding on the back of the donkey. For He was riding into Jerusalem to bear the sin of the whole world on the cross. *All* the brokenness, *all* the wretchedness, *all* the depravity, *all* the separation. *All* of it. What the crowd each knew in part, Jesus knew in full. **Which is why His joy this day exceeded theirs!** Yes, for Jesus did not ride into Jerusalem that day with a sour face and a look of dread, but with great joy! (Hebrews 12:2) For He was coming to set His creation free! Free from the bondage of sin and death. All those other mighty works of healing and life had been but small pointers to the work He was now to accomplish. That the joy of the crowd that day be extended to all creation.

And so Jesus' joy is Advent joy.

Did the crowds that day understand that? Certainly not. They did not understand the kind of King Jesus had come to be. *Which doesn't lessen their joy* - or the joy of the world at receiving great gifts at Christmas today - but it does teach us that there is an even greater joy, a different joy, an Advent joy. For what the crowd didn't understand that day has been revealed to us. That Jesus' kingdom is not of this world. That Jesus has come to give us much more than our best life now. He has come to give us the joy of a life that will never end. The joy of a life free from sin and death. A joy and life we cannot fully understand now, but that we see in Him. That seeing it in Him, we hunger and thirst after it.

The prophet Jeremiah had that kind of Advent joy. His words to us today direct our eyes beyond the here and now to what is coming; to *who* is coming. To the joy that will not be for a day, but for eternity.

And St. Paul had that kind of Advent joy. His words to us today direct our eyes not

to what is, but to what will be; to the joy of all that God the Father is working in us through Jesus.

And Jesus wants you to have that kind of Advent joy. A joy that transcends mere happiness, and goes much deeper. A joy that comes not from when our wishes are fulfilled, but when He fulfills needs we didn't even know we had. A joy that is present in good times and in bad; in times of plenty and times of want; when we get what we want and when others let us down; when surrounded by adoring crowds, or when hanging on a cross.

Do *you* understand such joy? Certainly not. Our joy is more often like the joy of the crowds that day. But Jesus is giving you His joy; working it in you. For His Spirit is working in you, to direct your eyes beyond the here and now, beyond what is to what will be. And we get glimpses of that joy. The joy in sorrow at the death of a saint. The joy in serving, even when the serving is hard. The joy of repentance, when our sins bring tears to our eyes, and we hear that our sin is forgiven.

This is Advent joy. The joy of our Lord's coming to us in weakness and in death, in trouble and in sorrow, into the depth of our sin, with His life and forgiveness.

This is Advent joy, for He comes not yet on the clouds of heaven with all His angels in glory, but riding on a donkey, or today, in water, words, and bread and wine. Coming lowly to the lowly, to give us what we need.

This is Advent joy, for though we receive our Lord and all His goodness, we are left hungry and thirsty for more. Not more stuff, more Lord, more forgiveness. Our eyes are fixed on Jesus in repentant joy, knowing that there is more. Much more. In Him.

This is Advent joy, for it is the joy of the cross. The cross of Jesus, and the joy He had in ascending it; and the cross He lays upon you, and the joy you have in bearing it.

And so the church is not a Christmas Scrooge with the season of Advent. We do not begrudge the world their Christmas joy. But Christmas joy is not all the joy there is. There is a joy the world knows not, and this is what we seek. And so we do not yet join our voices with the world in their carols. *We will*, but first we will lift up a new song, to mirror the song of the angels, and return their hymn of praise.

For when Jesus was born, the heavenly choir of angels called out to the inhabitants of earth: "*Glory to God in the highest and peace on **earth**.*" (Luke 2:14)

Today in the Holy Gospel, that song was returned, as when Jesus enters Jerusalem to go to the cross, the inhabitants of earth call out in return: "*Peace in **heaven** and*

glory in the highest."

And truly there is peace in heaven *and* on earth, for in Jesus, heaven and earth are reconciled. The barrier of sin is overcome. *The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29) has come, and so heaven and earth are united in praise. *Peace!* we cry to each other. *Glory!* we call out to one another. Our voices united as one.

That is why we sing these same words now - the words of the crowd - joining our song *with the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven*, singing to Jesus our "*Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.*" (Sanctus) For truly He is here, in glory and in peace. As truly as in the manger, and as truly as on the donkey that day. And as His same body and blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins, is placed onto your tongue and poured over your lips, your Jesus comes to you in joy, and gives you Advent joy. Advent joy, for though filled, yet still you are hungry. Though satisfied, yet still you are thirsty for more. And that, my friends, is good. For there is still more to come. For your King *has* come, but *is* coming again.

And until He does, we wait in Advent joy.
His joy. Repentant joy. Humble joy. Baptized joy. True joy.
So let us wait, repent, and fast for now.
Our joy is coming.
He is coming soon.
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 passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.