

27 November 2011  
Advent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

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“From Throne to Throne”

Text: Mark 11:1-10 | Isaiah 64:1-9; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9

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

Last Sunday we heard in the Holy Gospel that *when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne* (Matt 25:31). And we considered seeing Jesus on that throne, that glorious throne, at the end of time.

Today's Holy Gospel would seem to be quite different than that, and indeed it is. And yet there is a connection - for there's a throne of sorts that Jesus is sitting on today as well . . . He is on a colt, a young donkey. No one, we are told, has ever sat upon this throne before, and it is quite the opposite of glorious. Glorious would be to ride into Jerusalem on a swift, beautiful, powerful horse of war, not a young, awkward, humble beast of burden. But what honor is given this lowly donkey with no glory of his own - he is given the glory and honor of carrying on his back the Lord of all creation.

Yet as different as these two throne are, there is still another throne upon which our Lord will be placed. A throne that both includes and connects these first two. A throne that the other two thrones point to and come from. A throne that is both glorious *and* humble, powerful *and* weak, exalting *and* humiliating - and that is **the throne of the cross**. That is the throne Jesus is entering Jerusalem on that donkey to ascend, and it is the throne through which He will reign forever.

And so today, on the First Sunday of Advent, we begin a new Church Year by focusing on the cross. For the cross is the center of Jesus' story, it is the center of our stories, and it is the center of history. Without the cross, the birth of Jesus is simply an interesting historical fact. Without the cross, the return of our Lord at the end of time would mean condemnation for us all. But with the cross, all is changed. With the cross, a *Saviour* is born, and a *Saviour* is *coming again*.

And so there is simply no better way to prepare to celebrate the birth of our Saviour than by looking at the cross. And there is simply no better way to prepare for our Saviour's return at the end of time than by looking at the cross. And so the reading from Mark: Jesus entering Jerusalem - not just to celebrate the Passover, like all the

other pilgrims entering Jerusalem that day - but to BE the Passover. To BE the once-and-for-all Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. To BE the Lamb whose blood painted on the wood of the cross would rescue the world from death and provide for us the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life.

And so when we prayed earlier: *Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and be saved by Your mighty deliverance* (Collect for Advent 1), you should hear in those words both the past and the future. The **past**, for when our Lord *first* stirred up His power and came, it was in the birth we will remember in a few weeks, being born as a man to go to the cross for our sins. But it is also about the **future**, that our Lord would stir up His power and come again - this time not in a humble birth, but in His great might and glory, and finally and fully give us the deliverance from sin and the home in heaven that we long for.

*That we long for . . . for you do, don't you? Long for deliverance from your sins? Long for deliverance from their treating perils? . . . Ah, that's the problem, isn't it? We've grown too comfortable in this world, too comfortable with our sins, too comfortable with the way things are. And so we don't see the threatening perils of our sins. But that's a dangerous place to be. First* of all because it ignores the wrath and anger of God over sin, as Isaiah proclaimed. His wrath that is like **fire that kindles brushwood**, or **fire that causes water to boil**. And to risk making the greatest understatement of all time: *that should concern you*. And **second**, just because you may not see the danger, doesn't mean it's not there. In fact, that makes it all the more dangerous, for it can come upon us before we know it.

Perhaps the best example of that might be a flash flood. We've had lots of warnings about those lately. The thing about flash floods is that you often can't see them coming until it's too late. And if you *do* see it coming, it seems so harmless. That little bit of water moving over the road doesn't look like much, until you step or drive into the flow and get swept away, and then you realize the force, the strength, and the danger. *That's why flash floods often take lives*.

And so it is often with the sin in our lives. We don't recognize the danger. Perhaps you think your sin harmless, like just that little bit of water passing over the road. It's not really that bad; God understands. And nobody's really getting hurt. You can stop anytime you want.

*Don't be fooled!* Those little white lies are neither little nor white, are they? And oh, how they often escalate into bigger deceptions and secrets. Little indulgences become big addictions before you know it. Quick words now soon become the mushroom clouds of fighting and division. Envy grows into bitterness which grows into hatred. That anger you won't let go of robs you of joy and makes you resentful.

And when you love your sin it starves those around you of the love they need; the love you *should* be giving them. And in all these ways and a thousand more, how easy it is to get caught in the current and swept away . . . yes, even to spiritual death. For sin damages and kills faith and incurs a wrath of God that, as Isaiah omniously warns us, *makes even mountains shake!* Our sins - no matter how small they seem - truly *are* threatening and perilous.

And so Advent calls us to repentance and prayer. To **repent** of our sin and our cavalier attitude towards them, and to **pray** to our Father in heaven for the help and deliverance we need. That before He comes again in glory at the end of time, first: *Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come now, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and be saved by Your mighty deliverance.*

And thanks be to God our Lord did come, and does now come, to do this very thing. For after He ascended the cross to be the sacrifice for your sin and the sin of the world, Jesus then sent us His Spirit to give this deliverance to us. **First**, by revealing our sin and its depth and danger, and **then** by revealing our Saviour - that as we look to the cross we see the greatest mercy and love in the history of the world, as Jesus hangs there not in weakness, but in might, delivering us from the threatening perils of our sins. The threatening peril that He endured as He hung there in your place and mine, on the throne of our making.

But even as the torrent of our sin swept away His life, the torrent of His blood that flows from His cross now sweeps away not us but our sin. The torrent of His blood that washes away sin in Holy Baptism. The torrent of His blood that washes us clean in absolution. The torrent of His blood that fills the chalice of His Supper. That through these means where Jesus is coming to us now not in weakness but in might, we are being delivered from the threatening perils of our sins through the power of His forgiveness and the promise of eternal life.

And so in the manger and on the cross, in the font and on the altar and in the preaching of His Word, we see the answer the Isaiah's prayer: ***Oh that you would rend the heavens and come down!*** Our Lord is coming, now, strong to save. Our Lord is coming, now, that we repent. Our Lord is coming, now, not to sweep you away, but to sweep you *up* in His forgiveness and love and life. To restore to us what we lost in sin. To give us again the joy of His salvation.

That's the joy that St. Paul was speaking of also, when he wrote to the Corinthians. He didn't use the word joy there, but his words are full of joy. The joy of Christ and His promises. The joy of His Spirit and gifts. The joy of waiting ***for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** The *revealing* - which means that He is here now, just hidden. But the day is coming when what is now hidden will be revealed for all to

see. That Jesus *has been* answering our prayer, our Advent prayer, *rending the heavens and coming down to rescue and deliver us* all along.

And so He is keeping you. You are not on your own. He is with you. For He who rode into Jerusalem that day on the throne of a donkey, to ascend the throne of a cross, is enthroned now here in bread and wine. And so we join the crowds and in our liturgy sing ***“Hosanna! Blessed is He who cometh in the name of the Lord!”*** For He is coming. Just as really and truly as that day in Jerusalem. Yes, coming for you. And He won't stop until He comes again visibly on that last day, *when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him . . . sit[ting] on his glorious throne*. And He takes you to be with Him in His glory, forever.

Until that day we pray, *Savior of the Nations, Come!* (LSB #332) Come in mercy, come in grace, come in love, come with life, come with forgiveness, come with salvation, come in peace, come in might, come in lowliness . . . come to us, and make us your own. That is our Advent prayer.

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.