

2 December 2012
Advent 1

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Cheering the Coming of Our Lord”

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.

And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

This is the week Jesus had been waiting for. This is the week Jesus had come for. He goes up to Jerusalem now in order to be betrayed, arrested, and treated not like the majestic Son of God that He is, and not even as good as a despised criminal, but as someone deemed not worthy to live among men; someone for whom only the death penalty was fit. And so He enters to be beaten and flogged, mocked and humiliated, and then hung on a cross and left to die.

And the people cheered. He came to die, to suffer more than we can imagine, *and they cheered.*

And they should have! Yes, for Jesus was doing all this for them. He was taking all the sin and guilt that was theirs and putting it on Himself, so they wouldn't have to bear it. So that WE wouldn't have to bear it. For we are the criminals, law breakers, sinners, not Him. We are the ones who deserve divine punishment, not Him. We are the ones who should be hung up between heaven and earth, worthy of neither, and left to die. But so this does not happen to us, He came. And He goes up to Jerusalem.

But even more than that, this was not just the week Jesus had been waiting for, it was the week *all of creation* had been waiting for. An unbroken colt, who normally would have bucked off anyone who tried to sit on it, instead offered his humble and willing service. The stones were ready to cry out if the people failed to do so. It was time. Jesus was now making all things new (Rev 21:5) - a new heaven, a new earth, a new me, and new you. To, as Jeremiah said, ***fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. To execute on Himself justice and righteousness in the land. To be the Lord is our righteousness.***

Now, did the people know that at the time? Is that *why* they cheered? No. The disciples themselves were perplexed when Jesus told them this would happen before it did. Why should we expect others to know. No, their ***Hosanna!*** - *Save us!*

(which the other Gospel writers tell us were included in their cheers) - those cheers were probably to save them from the Romans. From the Roman occupation, Romans taxes, Roman rule and domination. To restore the kingdom to Israel; to go back to the good ol' days.

Except . . . *the good ol' days weren't really so good*. Israel messed up a lot. You don't have to search through the Scriptures very long to discover that fact. The fact that Israel had what they had and lived where they lived and for so long wasn't because of their steadfast faith and holy living, because they were worthy - but because of the mercy and longsuffering of their heavenly Father. He preserved them *so that He could preserve them*, save them, with a Saviour who would come from the flesh and blood of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David. And who would save not just them, but the whole world.

And so yes, Jesus came to restore the kingdom, but not *that* kingdom. Another one, a better one, an everlasting one. ***The King who comes in the name of the Lord*** was coming not to take His people back to the good ol' days, but to give us a future. A new life now that will last forever. For this, Jesus now ***goes up to Jerusalem***, and they cheered. Maybe *the right thing for the wrong reason*?

I don't think we're so different.

I don't. We cry our ***Hosannas!*** for Jesus to rescue us from all kinds of things too. All kinds of "Romans" of our own. Save me from this dead end job. Save me from the oppressive rules my parents make. Save me from my in-laws. Save me from failing these tests at school. Save me from what our politicians are doing. And more. *And those things aren't wrong to pray* - Jesus has told us to call on Him in every time of need. But if that's all we cry out to Him for, are we not wishing for some good ol' days of our own? Are we missing the bigger picture?

In the same way, do we only cheer when we get what we want? When God does what we think He *should* be doing, rather than rejoicing in all things, knowing that our heavenly Father is working good for us even in those things that are difficult and painful; even when He lays crosses on us in love? Maybe we even cry out ***Hosanna!*** for our Lord to save us from these crosses instead of through them . . .

So Advent calls us to repentance, that we might think a bit differently. To remind us, as the collect we prayed earlier said, that we need saving *from the threatening perils of our sins*. I'm not sure we always see our sins like that. I think we more often think of our sins as flaws, as bad habits, as things we need to work on - but they are much more than that. Much more. They are killers. Killers of relationships, killers of good, killers of life, killers of faith. That's why Jesus. That's why He went up to Jerusalem that day. That's why His cross.

And so Advent call us to repentance, for just as that day arrived for Jesus to enter into Jerusalem to die, so there is a day appointed and coming when Jesus is going to return to judge. That is the day we are waiting for. Advent really isn't about waiting for Christmas - that *advent*, or coming, of Jesus already happened. The *advent* of Jesus we are waiting for is His coming in glory. That is the day Paul had in mind when he wrote his prayer for the Thessalonians, that ***the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all . . . so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*** Or in other words, that until Jesus returns, we repent and live not just for today and not just for ourselves, but that we live for today *with an eye toward others and an eye toward tomorrow* - the tomorrow, whenever it comes, of Jesus' coming.

And you can look forward to that day with confidence when ***He establishes your heart blameless in holiness before our God and Father.*** When He established your heart, for that takes place in only one way: *forgiveness*. The only way your heart is going to ever be ***blameless in holiness before our God and Father*** is for your sins to be forgiven. There simply is no other way. You may look holy compared to others, you may even appear to some blameless in your worldly life, *but you know what others can't see* - all the shameful sin that lives in your heart. The evil and lustful desires, the anger and bitterness, the resentment, the thoughts and wishes you don't dare speak.

But for the forgiveness of all these things, that is why Jesus went up to Jerusalem that day. *To rescue us from the threatening peril of these sins*, our sins. To make us holy. Holy in the forgiveness of our sins. Holy and blameless even before our God and Father.

And for the forgiveness of all these things is why Jesus is coming here today.

That through the water of **Holy Baptism** *He rescue us from the threatening peril of our sins*, snatching us from the flood of sin and death through the washing of water and the Word.

That through the words of **Holy Absolution** and the **Holy Gospel** Jesus continue to *rescue us from the threatening peril of our sins*, lifting you up from the sins that drag you down each week, breaking the bonds of sin and guilt that forgiven, you may live the new life He has given you.

And that through the Body and Blood of **Holy Communion** *He rescue us from the threatening peril of our sins* by giving us His once crucified but now glorified Body and Blood - what the church fathers called "the medicine of immortality;" a down

payment and pledge of the glory that will be ours when He comes again.

For while it is true that Jesus is present everywhere, He *advents* here, in these ways, for you, with His absolute, iron clad promise of forgiveness. That since we can't go to the Jordan, we can't sit with Jesus and hear Him teaching, we weren't in the Upper Room, and we can't go back to the cross or empty tomb - *Jesus brings all that here to you, for you.* That what He earned in time be given in eternity.

That's why we cheer in our liturgy - *did you know we cheer in our liturgy?* That's why we cheer in our liturgy just as the people cheered Jesus going into Jerusalem that day. For the salvation Jesus was born to provide and that He enters Jerusalem to achieve He now comes to give each one of us. And so we sing *Hosanna! Blessed in He who comes in the name of the Lord!*

And we are not alone. It is a great crowd cheering still today, for no matter how big or small the church may be, cheering with us are *the angels and archangels and all the company of heaven*; patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs - all who waited, all who foretold, all who witnessed our Saviour and His work, rejoicing with us, cheering with us.

And thus forgiven, with our hearts thus established, we can look forward to the day of Jesus' coming again with as much joy as we await the remembrance of His first coming at Christmas. For we have nothing to fear. *Rescued from the threatening peril of our sins*, we have a glorious future promised us and awaiting us. And as we await that day, we live even now in that joy. The repentant joy of sinners made saints, of criminals made sons, of the hopeless given hope, of the dead given life. That because Jesus entered Jerusalem that day in humility, we will enter the new Jerusalem one day in glory. On the day and in the glory that will never end.

And so this season we sing: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel!* For He did, and He does, and He will.

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.