

Matthew 21:8-9 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

The word advent means "coming." In a generic sense, there are many advents around us. We are reminded of many things that are coming. We have seen tons of advertisements that remind us that Christmas is just a few weeks away.

When we go shopping, we can tell that Christmas is coming just by looking around at the decorated trees and Christmas lights. "Black Friday" is a great secular reminder that Christmas is coming.

The end of the this year is also coming—the new year is coming as well, just a little more than a month away.

As we go through the church year and the readings for specific Sundays, the Lord will come again—this time in judgment and in all His glory. This gets us to where we are today: The First Sunday in Advent.

Why are we observing the season of Advent? It's a penitential season. It's a preparatory season, much like Lent. The triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is read in both seasons, but during Advent, especially today, we are reminded of our Lord's return.

The temptation to say we're just getting ready for Christmas is great, but also for His second coming in the flesh.

Our Lord's first coming in the flesh took place over 2000 years ago, but that's not why we have four weeks of Advent. As we begin the Advent season, it is truly meet, right, and salutary that we celebrate His incarnation—His birth on Christmas Eve.

Let us remember to also prepare for His coming to us in His Word and Sacraments, and to prepare for His coming on the Last Day.

That gets us to where we are today, the first day of a new church year, the First Sunday in Advent, *Ad te levavi*, which is Latin for "To You, O Lord, I lift up my soul."

This is what we do today and throughout the season of Advent, lifting up our souls to God, praising Him, just as the crowds in our text did, receiving the King who was coming to save them from their sins, whether they realized it or not. **"Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!"**

We praise Him in this manner as we prepare to receive Him as He comes to us today in His Word and Sacrament—the Lord's Supper. Just as the crowds in Jerusalem welcomed Jesus as He came riding in to Jerusalem on a donkey.

Knowing that He is coming, we ought to prepare ourselves to meet Him, getting ourselves ready to celebrate His coming, whether today in His Word or on the Last Day. We prepare ourselves during this penitential season of Advent especially as we reflect upon our sins and our need for a Savior.

One thing we may not fully understand is why the Palm Sunday account is the Holy Gospel reading for the First Sunday in Advent. The connection is there between 33 A.D. and 2025: the people of God welcoming the Messiah as King.

There is another connection: these same people, then and now, have turned their backs on Him. These same people who welcomed the Son of David on Palm Sunday would also call for His crucifixion on Good Friday.

Yes, it was our sin too that put Jesus on the cross. Our sins of putting everything else as more important in our lives than being faithful to God's Word. During this penitential season of Advent, this time of preparation, we need to examine ourselves.

Will you be ready to welcome Jesus this Christmas, or are you taking Christ out of Christmas by your words and your actions?

Will you take full advantage of the Divine Service, or will you be too busy to come to our Lord's house for rest, and receive his gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation and strength for the journey ahead.

The question is what are your priorities this Advent? Are you searching for meaning in your life through all the activities and monetary things, like rehearsals, programs, parties, or even at the mall?

During this time of the year, we find ourselves pulled in many different directions and away from our Lord's house. We crave rest, but we don't find it in our numerous activities.

If anything, we become more tired and stressed out than before. We can lose sight of the Christ child on Christmas Day.

Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is near.

Paul reminds us in the Epistle for today. **Romans 13:11-14** “The hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. ¹²The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. ¹³Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. ¹⁴**But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.**

It is for this reason that Jesus came into the world: to save us from our sins, living up to His Name. It is for this reason that Jesus came into this world in all humility, born like one of us and in a barn, because there was no room for Him, Mary, and Joseph in the inn.

It is for this reason that Jesus made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem: to fulfill the Old Testament prophecy.

Zechariah 9:9 “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

He accepted the cheers on Palm Sunday and the jeers on Good Friday—for you! He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted—for you! He willingly took on the crown of thorns, the whipping, and the beatings—for you! He bled and died—for you, to take all your sins away!

This is why we confess in the Nicene Creed our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, “who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary and was made man and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried.”

This would not be much of a confession of faith had it ended right there. But on the third day, we continue to confess, Jesus “rose again according to the Scriptures.” His new life is our new life, too!

By His glorious resurrection from the dead, Jesus opened to us eternal life in heaven,

In heaven we will forever dine at the heavenly Feast He has prepared for us, who will forever sing, **“Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!”** “Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

It is this song of the angels, archangels, and all the company of heaven that we sing every time we are about to receive the Lord's Supper, a foretaste of the Feast to come.

As we gather around our Lord's Table, singing the hymn they forever sing in heaven: the Sanctus.

In the history of the choral Mass, this hymn was regarded by composers as two separate pieces: the Sanctus (Holy) and the Benedictus (Blessed is He).

We sing these together as one great hymn because they flow from one to the other and are forever connected by the Word who became flesh—Jesus Christ—in His body and blood.

Let us prepare to receive Him who comes to us in Word and Sacrament. Let us during this Advent season prepare to meet Him at the time appointed for His return on the Last Day. Let us prepare by confessing our sins to God our Father, and receiving His forgiveness for Jesus' sake.

Singing this great hymn, proclaiming Jesus' holiness and omnipresence, lifting up our hosannas as cries for mercy and as songs of praise, and announcing that He is blessed who comes in the Name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest indeed. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! Amen.