

**THE FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT / AD TE LEVAVI**

Text: St. Matthew 21:1-9

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

*“Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.”*

Our LORD, JESUS CHRIST, rode into God’s holy city of Jerusalem as the King of kings and LORD of lords. Just as a triumphant general of the ancients would have done, JESUS rode into God’s capital city in triumph as the people shouted His name and sang His praises. Yet, JESUS would be a disappointment to many.

While the people anticipated the MESSIAH to be a king of majesty and great power, JESUS did not quite measure up to their exaggerated expectations. In fact, instead of receiving a crown of gold, a royal robe, and a royal throne fit for a king, by week’s end, JESUS would wear a crown of thorns, even as He was stripped naked and His enemies, among whom were many of the very same people who shouted their hosannas to the SON OF DAVID, would *nail* Him to His throne.

By the week’s end, our LORD’s Body would bear the scars and bruises of battle, and He would suffer and die. Yet, die He must. This was His cup to drink, His cross to bear, and it was for this very reason that He came. JESUS, whose name means “*God saves*,” JESUS, the IMMANUEL who is “*God with us*” must die, because in His suffering and death is His triumph—and ours. Through His innocent suffering and death, He won for us the battle against sin, Satan, and the grave. Yet, is this the picture you expect as the Great Feast of the Nativity of Our LORD approaches? How does this fit in with the idea that Advent is somehow an opening act for Christmas?

We have reached the beginning of a new Church year and the liturgical season of Advent has made its annual arrival. Contrary to contemporary experience, the season of Advent is not a welcome mat for Christmas. While we remember and commemorate the birth of the CHRIST, Christmas is an historical event that cannot be relived, but only recalled.

Thus, for liturgical Christians, Advent is a season for expectant watching and penitential waiting. On Christmas, we commemorate the birth of JESUS—His first coming—but He will not “*enter a second time into His mother’s womb and be born.*” He has already united His divinity with our humanity in order to bear our sins, and this established fact will not be repeated. Neither the season of Advent, nor even Christmas Day, are set aside so Christians can expectantly anticipate the rebirth of the SON of God.

Therefore, Advent is not simply a prelude to Christmas. It is, instead, a season all about watchful waiting for our LORD who has come, who is here even now, and who has promised to come again. Advent is a season of joyful waiting in the knowledge that in JESUS, the promise of salvation has already been fulfilled in His first Advent; and penitential waiting because we know that when He comes again JESUS will come as our Judge; and confident waiting because as Christians, we live for His return with the conviction that in Him and with Him we have God's promise of eternal life.

For JESUS comes with a holy purpose; He is a man with a mission as it were. He will not be turned from it, either to the left or to the right, though He knows what it means to carry His mission to completion. He comes to Jerusalem, to the place of sacrifice, to die as *the* perfect, spotless sacrifice. He comes to fulfill a promise that is nothing less than the will and Word of God. He comes to crush the head of Satan and beat back death and Hell. Therefore, repentant sinners, rejoice! Your King has come.

The Prophet Zechariah tells us, *"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you."* Your Messiah is coming to die and the people praise Him. *"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!"* Their praise rings out through the ages because His is no ordinary death. Rather, it is the death of death.

We join in this celebration singing loud hosannas to our LORD as we celebrate His coming to us in His Body and Blood given to us in His Holy Supper. In our liturgy we join in this song of praise in the three-fold Holy, Holy, Holy of the Sanctus. We sing with the angels and arch angels and all the company of heaven. We sing with the blessed saints who have preceded us, and we bow with them before our God laying our prayers and our sins on the path before Him.

So, we wait—patiently, expectantly, and penitentially. We may suffer for our faith as we wait, we may even fall asleep as we wait, but we will awake with joy at the words, *"... Behold, your King is coming to you."* Our sleep and our little while of suffering will be forgotten and our joy never ending

We, who are Easter people, living our lives in this New Testament age, look to JESUS' second coming and await His return, but as we wait, we do not wait alone. For our LORD has promised, *"... lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."* Every gathering of God's people to receive His gifts and praise His Holy name, His every Word read, taught, and preached into the hearts of His people, every celebration of the Holy Eucharist, are celebrations of His promise to be with us always.

He comes now in His Word and Sacraments. He comes through the same HOLY SPIRIT and in the same way He came to the blessed Virgin's womb; by hearing. He comes not simply in some spiritual or abstract way; He comes with living human flesh and blood. In the same manner that the Virgin Mary was overshadowed by the Most High and conceived a child, you too, are overshadowed and within your heart faith is conceived, giving birth to life.

This life is nurtured and made strong in the meal that Jesus has given us until His promised return. In it, we proclaim His death until He comes again. But we do not simply proclaim His death, we proclaim what His death means to us: absolution, that is, the forgiveness of sins. His death is absolution because it is, for us, a substitution for our death. It bestows, forgiveness of sins, and as the blessed Martin Luther wrote, *“where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.”* (Martin Luther’s explanation of the Sacrament of the Altar, the Small Catechism) In celebrating the LORD’s Supper we proclaim our life in Christ until He comes again.

So we wait. We wait because we are Advent people. We live in the afterglow of CHRIST’s first advent and in the hope of His second advent and His promised return. But we do not hope like heathens and pagans. Christian hope is not a “maybe” or “perhaps.” Christian hope is sure and certain fact—Christian hope is *“the conviction of things not seen.”* It is fact, because it is God’s promise and God cannot lie.

We look forward to the second Advent of our LORD, JESUS. We look for the return of our reigning LORD who is seated at the right hand of the Father. In this second coming He will raise a new creation out of the death and ashes of the old creation. He will make all things new. In this new creation JESUS will raise us from the dead, giving us the eternal life that is already ours now by faith in Him.

Your King has come and will come again. Of this you can be sure. On that great and glorious day you will say, *“Hosanna to the SON of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!”* Then you will hear something you will remember and talk about for the rest of eternity, for the SON of David shall say, *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON, AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

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