

KING JESUS HAS HOSANNA'D FOR YOU

Hear again the Word of the Lord this first day of the New Church Year:

Save now!

O Son of David!

*-- The One having been blessed, continually coming in the
Name of the Lord --*

Save now in the highest!¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Happy New Year! This is the first day of the New Church Year. This is a year, in our four-year rotation, in which we will be hearing from our preachers of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of our sins primarily through the preaching of the Sunday Gospel texts. God has prepared us for this day through the end of the Church Year. We are responding today to last week's Gospel call to watching for the final coming of our Lord Jesus.

This day the New Year begins with recollection of the earthly Advent of our Lord as triumphant King. To shouts of "Hosanna" demands that Jesus "Save Now!" a year begins. This it has done so for centuries with the Word of God in our Gospel reading which is testified to by four witnesses: Saints Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The parallel records of this event by all four evangelists means that today's narrative of Jesus' Triumphal Entrance is very important for those who would be of the Faith.

Yet, this is not the first time this calendar year that you have heard the evangelists' report. When does the Triumphal Entrance of Jesus show up elsewhere each year?

Yes, on Palm Sunday we hear this day's proclamation from a Gospel reading. It is also an alternate Gospel text for the fifth Sunday of Lent. Finally, from John's Gospel, it shows up on Monday of Holy Week.

¹ Matthew 21:9b.

Now, none of us *needs* to know by heart when Jesus' riding into Jerusalem as King shows up in the Church Year. That is not necessary for our salvation. Yet, being more than acquainted with the rhythm of the Church Year, and understanding why Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem begins each New Year, can be helpful for us as we learn to use the treasures of the Faith. Unlike confessions which do not follow the pattern of the Life of Christ in the world and the Life of Christ in the Church, our practice helps keep our hearts, minds and lives centered on the Jesus of the Bible. It annually helps us remember why we watch for His final coming. It gives us the earthly realities of the divine, which are declared so that we continue to remember why He first came in the flesh.

The Word for today sets up the hearers of the Word for the central event in human history – the answer of God to His people's cries of "Save Now!" It leads us to the most significant work of God for His people. That saving work was to take their sins, your sins, the sins of the whole world, upon the Son of David. He, Jesus, bore them into death and the grave.

Jesus' triumphal Advent into Jerusalem long ago led to that holy event. His entrance, heralded as the promised Son of David, began the days that led to Jesus' ascension to the throne. His enthronement took place upon the rough wood of a cross, outside the walls of the city whose people and the pilgrim throngs had called out Hosannas to Him just a few days before. It is that of which you confessed to be true with the words of the Athanasian Creed (which this congregation asked to confess, many years ago, on the fifth Sundays of months whenever they may fall). That served as a good foundation to begin this New Year – not that we *have* to begin each new Church Year in the same fashion). In addition, you just sang about Jesus' receiving His crown in the fifth verse of the Hymn of the Day. All of that and more was heralded with these words:

All of you say to the Daughter of Zion:

*“Behold! Your King comes to you,
meek, and having been seated on a she-ass,
and upon (a) colt, (the) son of (a) beast of burden.”²*

With those words, we learn that you, in this New Testament generation of the Church, are not alone in remembering God’s Word through a set Church Year series. Theirs, unlike ours, was set up in Scripture, by God, through Moses and the prophets. Old Testament prophecies which the faithful had been waiting to be fulfilled since the early 7th century BC are proclaimed as completed in Jesus. In addition, from the Book written as the Second Temple was completed before King Herod got his hands on it, the Messianic prophecy of the King is declared fulfilled by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. For five and a half centuries, as the Temple was violated at least twice, the Word of God which you hear repeated a couple of times each year stood waiting for *the* Church Year Feast in which it would find its fulfillment.

That was during the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Scripture shows that the entire means by which Jesus entered Jerusalem’s gates that day almost 2,000 years ago was carefully laid out by God. He did so that you, and all believers, would have no doubt that Jesus was sent to complete all God’s promises to save His people.

(We shall save all the details about the logistics of the Lord’s Triumphal entrance for another day – maybe Palm Sunday, maybe not. We don’t plan that far ahead. That is because we do not desire to hinder the Holy Spirit as He works through the cycle of readings each week. He uses the rhythm of the Church Year. In it, He builds us up in its readings into greater knowledge and use of the Faith in Christ). Our Gospel reading continues. These words come after the declaration of the narrative which informs the hearer how God completed His prophecy of Jesus’ Advent as King that day long ago:

² *Ibid.*

And the crowds were going before Him, and were following Him.

They cried out, continually saying:

Save now!

O Son of David!

*-- The One having been blessed, continually coming in the
Name of the Lord --*

Save now in the highest!³

Two crowds, one heading into, or already in, Jerusalem, and one following Jesus, are named. The first would have consisted of those who lived in the Holy City or who had arrived early for the Feast. The second was likely comprised of those who had been on pilgrimage to the Feast and those who had just witnessed Jesus' resurrection of Lazarus from the dead.

All of them, Jews and God-fearers alike, knew in which season of the Church Year they were. They would have been well-catechized in the hymns of the Feasts. They would have known, the majority by memory, of the Psalms of the Hallel given to be used at the Feasts.

The faithful of old would have known the public worship tradition of the Second Temple. That appears to be that the crowds in Jerusalem, particularly the Levites, the priests, as they received the festal pilgrims, would chant the verses we have chosen for today's emphasis text. St. Matthew records that they were chanting two verses near the end of the 118th Psalm. (Well... he does not say that, but the words of the crowds which he recorded are direct quotes of the verses we number 25 and 26).

It also was the Feast-goers worship custom to sing or chant the words of the *Hallel* (*Psalms* 113-118) Psalm on the night before the killing of the Passover Lambs. They used a pattern such as the one in which we spoke Psalm 24 today (and do many Wednesdays, and will begin to do as we chant the Psalms about twice monthly beginning this year on Sundays). It was customary for the Feast-

³ *Matthew* 21:9b.

keeping Jews to chant the *Hallel Psalms* antiphonally. (This appears to be what Jesus and His disciples did on the night in which He was betrayed).⁴

Ahhh... but in turning your thoughts to Maundy Thursday, I have skipped five days past this day's text. In part, that is because we cannot rightly divide the Word of God and proclaim His triumphal Advent in the Flesh, as King, without declaring how He would inaugurate His reign – in His passion and death. With that reality in mind, think back to the chant of the crowds, which was:

Hosanna!

O Son of David!

*-- The One having been blessed, continually coming in the
Name of the Lord --*

*Hosanna in the highest!*⁵

Those words, the ending strains of the Gospel reading for the opening of each new Church Year, help keep our minds from thinking of this first season as “pre-Christmas.” The purple of repentance and the rose of joy, the traditional colors of this four Sunday season this year, help reflect the reality of the Advent's texts. If you are thinking that we speak too much of the Church Year, learn that the ancient faithful truly rejoiced in it. The seasons' readings all are given to declare Jesus coming as humble King to bear your sins into death, to grant you forgiveness and blessed life everlasting. The colors of this season serve to keep us away from a more modern over-emphasis on earthly symbols of hope – as most clearly shown in the color of the blessed Virgin Mary: blue – to the more traditional and biblical emphasis on Christ's coming as the Savior. In Him alone do we who are faithful find our hope, peace, joy and sacrificial love.

Whether they understood that or not at the time, that is just what the crowds were clamoring for that day. They shouted *Hosanna!* That is a prayer, a

⁴ Cf. *Matthew* 26:30 and *Mark* 14:26; Mann, C.S. *Mark, The Anchor Bible Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 1986, 581.

⁵ *Matthew* 21:9b.

demand, for Salvation. It is not a praise word, such as *Alleluia!* Literally, from the ancient Hebrew language, they were repeatedly demanding of Jesus: *Cause to save now O Son of David* and *Cause to save now in the highest!*

Those are cries to the Messiah. That is made clear by the Gospel writers in the manner in which they are placed in the narrative. With words traditionally associated with leading up to the killing of the Passover lambs, God's people welcome God's Son. The Word of God shows that He intends to cause to save His people in the death of the King, King Jesus, David's Son.

As you light the candles on your home Advent wreaths, or simply rejoice to see one lit here, recall why Jesus came into this world. Yes, He came as King – the purple today reflects that. Yet, He came to die – the purple also indicates that. He has come to bring you true hope, peace, joy and love in His death in your sins. This is what this season of repentance is given to recall.

This is a time of year to remember that which God has done for us, and continues to do for us, in Christ Jesus. That is why, for centuries, the *Gloria in Excelsis* has been purposefully removed during Advent from the liturgies – the public services – of the Church. We are not like those who today acclaim Jesus' Advent into Jerusalem in church assemblies which do not focus on the Good News of Jesus Christ. In His Word, in the Church Year's remembrances, we will not be fooled into taking our eyes off the reason Jesus came, comes, and will come a final visible time into His creation. In the light of the Word given forth in this season, the forces of darkness that surround us are driven back.

This fourteen-century old season, Advent, is a true season of light. With the growing illumination of the colored candles we may recall that the world which once remained in darkness was driven back by the light of Christ's coming. Jesus has answered His people's cries to Save Now! King Jesus has Hosanna'd for you in this year of the proclamation of the Gospels!

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Advent I (*LSB* one-year series)

Psalm 24; Jeremiah 23:5-8; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 21:1-9

November 30, 2014

Pastor Michael L. Merdhouse

Soli Deo Gloria