

The First Sunday in Advent, December 1, 2024

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

The Reason He's Here

Luke 19:28–40

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:2

Throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. And as He rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. As He was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” (vv 35b–38)

Thanksgiving is now in the rearview mirror. December has arrived. What will this month bring? The same thing it brings every year, probably. That crazy season after the turkey gets cooked and before the opening of the presents. You know the signs of this season: Lights and decorations in the neighbor's yard. Christmas tree farms hang out their shingles. Stores shelves pack the perfect gift for each person in your life, and you can grab all the stocking stuffers you want while waiting in line to check out. The world stands ready to celebrate the season of giving. Meanwhile, we Christians are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus, God's gift of salvation to His broken world.

Then we have today's Gospel reading. The Church directs our attention to Jesus riding a colt into Jerusalem. That may seem strange. Shouldn't we be focusing on Mary and Joseph? But instead of the little babe, no crying He makes, we have the grown-up Jesus. That's how our Advent begins. We see Jesus not as an obscure figure beginning His ministry but as a well-known teacher near the end. We meet Him not in the womb of His mother as she rides a donkey into Bethlehem but as a celebrated Lord, drawing crowds of disciples, as He rides a colt into Jerusalem.

Why begin the season of Advent like this? Why head toward Christmas by starting with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem? It seems odd. But this is God's way of grabbing our attention. And we need our attention grabbed, oh, do we ever. You know how it gets pulled in a hundred different directions every day. December can be especially distracting. So this is God's way of saying, “The reason I'm here is” It takes us

straight to the heart of the matter. Just see where Jesus rides that donkey, and you'll understand why He came.

The Church Year never lets us forget. Today is the first Sunday of a series of Sundays which will take us through the life of our Lord and into the life of His Church. As we begin this new year in the Church, God wants us to know the one thing that's most important: The reason He's here.

God the Father has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to bear your sin and be your Savior. The suffering of Jesus was no accident. It wasn't just what happens to a nice person who loves in a world filled with hate. It was purposeful. It was the fulfillment of what God had promised to His people of old. In Jesus, we see the righteous Branch that sprang up for David. He comes in the name of the Lord to establish justice and righteousness. **This is the name by which [He is] called: "The Lord is our righteousness"** (Jer 33:16). He sets things right. He makes us right with God.

God the Father sent His Son into the world to defeat all the forces that oppose His Kingdom. Jesus came to bear sin and bring forgiveness. Jesus came to defeat death and bring life. Jesus came to conquer Satan and bring salvation. This is why He rides into Jerusalem. This is why He goes to the cross. His crucifixion is the day of reckoning for sin, death, and the devil. That's their day of judgment. By Easter Sunday, their fate is sealed. But for you, as you long for His coming, His death and resurrection are the day of salvation. For you, as you weep over sin and death, He comes humble, gentle, gracious, and full of forgiveness.

So Advent begins another year of grace. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every year, every Advent, every morning, including this one. And we'll hear that again and again during this Church year. No matter what Sunday it is, no matter what text of Scripture is read, no matter what hymns you are singing, even with all the variety they contain, this is the reason why God is here: To bring you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

December may be a wild month. We know that as well as anyone (can you say "Living Nativity"?!). Our lives are complex, busy, even messy. Some of you have been through major losses or life changes in the last year. You're still trying to sort out what those changes mean. Maybe you find relationships with family or friends are tense, and you're uncertain how to navigate them. Or perhaps there's some stress that you're dealing with—financial, personal, vocational—and you're not sure how it will resolve.

Into this mess of anxiety, Jesus comes to take us to what lies at the heart of the matter: God's love for us. God's care for us. God's forgiveness of us. God's promises to us. It may not fix every issue now. It may not take away all the anxiety. But it will set you on solid ground. You're a child in a kingdom where God, your Father, loves you. At the heart of His love is the person of His Son. Though it leads to His death, Jesus will do the work of His Father. He will come and bear what needs to be borne, fight what needs to be fought, and die to put to death what needs to end. And He will rise and bring the beginning of life, eternal life to you.

The Lord will do as He says. He who had need of the colt to carry out His work in Jerusalem also has need of you. He can and will use you for His purposes. In Jesus, your life—crazy as it may be—has significance. As God is love, He's able to make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all. As God is faithful, He's able to establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, so that you're prepared for the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

December has arrived, but Jesus comes with it. Rest for a moment today. Get out your Advent wreath this evening and light the first candle, just as we've done this morning here in Church. Begin your Advent devotions. Say your prayers. Read your Bible.

Jesus has come. Not just in Jerusalem, but here. Not this time on a colt but in His Word. Not surrounded by crowds throwing cloaks on a road, but still surrounded by disciples. You and me. Here, in this place, Jesus comes to remind us and assure us. Grace is the reason He is here.

The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil 4:7

Luke 19:28-40

²⁸ And when he had said these things, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹ When he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany, at the mount that is called Olivet, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰ saying, “Go into the village in front of you, where on entering you will find a colt tied, on which no one has ever yet sat. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ you shall say this: ‘The Lord has need of it.’” ³² So those who were sent went away and found it just as he had told them. ³³ And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴ And they said, “The Lord has need of it.” ³⁵ And they brought it to Jesus, and throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶ And as he rode along, they spread their cloaks on the road. ³⁷ As he was drawing near—already on the way down the Mount of Olives—the whole multitude of his disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen, ³⁸ saying, “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” ³⁹ And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” ⁴⁰ He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.”