**Matthew 21:1-11 December 1, 2019**

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

Our text for this morning comes from our Gospel lesson, Matthew 21 here re-reading these words. “And 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!” This is our text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In a way the story begins at the end. We don’t begin Advent with baby Jesus cooing in the manger instead we see him riding triumphantly into Jerusalem as Matthew records on a donkey and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden. And if we think about it from what we know already of Jesus life, the story doesn’t begin with him as a man, but it does end there. The final stages of his state of humiliation are when he is a grown man, as are the first steps and continuation of his state of exaltation. We know how the story ends when he enters into Jerusalem. He doesn’t go there to dwell with his disciples. He isn’t there to sight see and take in the vast wonders of the temple. He’s not even there to reign in earthly authority, becoming a new King of the empire of that time, by forcing out the Romans and establishing a place of power for the Jews. No, he rides in to die. He goes to Jerusalem to ultimately suffer at the hands of the Pharisees, chief priest, and scribes, be condemned by Pontius Pilate, be crucified, die, and be buried. These are the final steps in his humiliation, the moments when he has set aside his divine power in order to die for the sins of the entire world. And as we know he does not stay dead, but he descends into hell to declare his victory over Satan, rises from the dead to declare his victory over death and finally ascends into heaven to intercede for us at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, the place where he will come from when he returns to take us to be with him on a final day of judgment.

The story of Jesus life doesn’t begin in Jerusalem with him riding on a donkey, so why does Advent begin that way? After all, this is the first Sunday of the Church Year, it’s the refocusing of our lives on the Festival season where we look forward to Christmas and ultimately the gift of God’s own son, the Word made flesh the very Word that existed before the world. This is incarnation language, or word made flesh language, or God taking on flesh. So why are we greeted with a story of the grown-up Jesus entering into a city to die? Why would we possibly need to hear about Jesus coming to Jerusalem, when we haven’t even read about his coming into the world and being born?

The answer lies in what the people and his disciples say, and what his ultimate mission was. “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” Matthew records these words speaking of his kingly nature with “Son of David!” But Luke comes out and makes specific reference to it in His Gospel. “Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!” In Luke’s recording of Jesus entering into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, it’s almost an echo of the words of the angels in the fields to the shepherds with a few small, but very significant changes. To refresh our memories the angels, declare in Luke 2: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.” Which brings us to the two main distinctions or differences. The angels talk about the peace on earth, rather than peace in heaven.

Christ triumphantly enters Jerusalem as a King, just as he enters as a baby as a King. We see this understanding when the magi bow down and present him with gifts that are associated with royalty at Epiphany when he is older. We see this in the fear of Herod as he hunts down Jesus as a threat to his throne. Here we see Jesus triumphantly riding in as a King, and hailed as a King, ‘the very Son of David!’ the greatest of kings and most recognized name among God’s people, but his mount isn’t a warhorse it’s a colt. There is no royal entourage, no servants or soldiers with him, only disciples, fishermen, common place individuals. There is no gold, or pomp or circumstance, only the cry of the people who rejoice that he is there, as the King who comes in the name of the Lord. He is a different King, a King not of earthly power and might but a King who rules and reigns with love. As we saw last week, a King whose kingdom was not of this world, and who ultimately showed his devotion and care by innocently being convicted and dying in the place of his guilty servants, with two thieves hanging on each side. He is a king with understanding. With a care not just for his own people, but for all people of all time.

Which is why this is presented here at the beginning of Advent, to remind us of his rule and authority. To show us that He is the King that was foretold by the prophets, from Isaiah to Jeremiah and so on. The one by whom Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. The one whose name will be called “The Lord is our righteousness.” The root of Jesse, the heir of David’s line, the ultimate King of Kings who would rule and reign over the world. The one who had the authority and power to destroy sin and its stain. The only true authority in this world.

The one that we sadly turn a deaf ear to, that we don’t follow, that we rebel against and run away from. The King whose authority comes even to us lowly, miserable, and unworthy subjects, and who offers us nothing but redemption and forgiveness, but we still turn a deaf ear and think of ourselves as more worthy than him. We who disregard his laws, who disregard his gifts, who put only ourselves on the throne of prominence in our lives. We, gathered together, as the unworthy servants of the true King.

Advent is a reminder of our sin and unworthiness, of our relation to the King of Glory and the ultimate authority in this world. A reminder that we by ourselves are not worthy to stand in his presence or serve him because we are not worthy on account of sin. Which is why Advent begins not with the incarnation; the promise to Mary that she would conceive of a child and that child was the Son of God. Instead it begins with atonement language. The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the King entering Jerusalem not to reign, but to die. It’s the first picture of the Church Year. Jesus riding in on a colt, to sacrifice himself for the sins of the entire world. Because through his death, we have fellowship again with God our Heavenly Father. He is the originator and creator of peace not just on Earth, but in heaven as well.

The accounts of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem show us this truth with different language. Matthew points more to the Kingship of Jesus coming from David, and that the people cry out “hosanna in the highest”. Luke records a different phrase that is unique to His Gospel. We’re more used to hearing peace on earth, or peace being with us on account of Christ. But Luke says that the crowd of Jesus disciples shouted. “Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” Peace in heaven, or peace with those who dwell there. That peace is obtained only through the work of Christ. For nothing that we here on Earth can do or ever could do could possibly get us peace in heaven. We cannot earn peace in heaven, we cannot even understand the reality of heaven. Our earthly intellect and logic can’t process the understanding of something that is completely and totally 100% good because we are so shrouded and covered in evil. But the true peace in heaven comes by His death and resurrection, because on account of his blood, we are made perfect in the eyes of our Heavenly Father. And because his creation is made perfect again, all that was destroyed in the fall into sin is made right once more. Now on account of Jesus Christ, the perfect King, the omnipotent Son of God sacrificing his life on the cross, the imperfection of creation is reconciled to God the Father. And we are made holy. And are brought into his presence on the day we are taken to be with him. Christ is the peace. The peace in heaven and earth. The prince of peace. The peace that surpasses all understanding.

While the end of the Church Year was a focus on the chaos and uncertainty of the times that we live in, we still focus on the peace of the moment that Christ returns. We still sing of the coming Christ even today. We echo the words of the Gospels and especially the words found here in Matthew, when in the Service of the Sacrament in the Divine Service settings sing the Sanctus, and we sing the exact same words that we find recorded for the crowds, “Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” We still emphasize Christ’s entrance into Jerusalem, and ultimately his death and resurrection. In the breaking of the bread, in the confession of our sins, in the remembrance of our Baptism. In a fellowship of peace and understanding, with hope for the future lives that we will live with Christ, and for the days to come as we prepare for the coming King.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.