

Ad te levavi
St. Matthew 21:1-9
December 1st, 2019
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

When They Drew Near

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank Thee, we bless and praise Thee forever, that Thou didst send Thy Son to rule over us poor sinners, who for our transgressions did justly deserve to remain in the bondage of sin and Satan, and didst give us in Him a meek and righteous King, Who by His death became our Savior from sin and eternal death: We beseech Thee so to enlighten, govern and direct us by Thy Holy Spirit, that we may ever remain faithful to this righteous King and Savior, and not, after the manner of the world, be offended with His humble form and despised Word, but, firmly believing in Him, obtain eternal salvation; through the same, Thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one true God, world without end. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

As we come to the beginning of another Church's year, we hear the Gospel from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew, the Twenty-First chapter. As I have said before, often, this Gospel seems out of place here at the beginning of the season of Advent. Our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem is a narrative that fits best during Holy Week, as we approach our Lord's suffering and death on our behalf. However, this reading fits the beginning of Advent if we consider one thing: on Palm Sunday the Gospel is reflecting the historical narrative of our Lord's life. Here on the Ad te levavi, the First Sunday in Advent, this Gospel is reflecting the spiritual aspects of this text.

As we have heard many times, the season of Advent encompasses three ways in which our Lord + Jesus, the Christ, comes to us. We contemplate the way that He came to us in the past. We hear of His incarnation; His birth into our flesh as He came down from His heavenly throne, put aside His divinity, so that He could be born of the Virgin Mary and live a perfect life, so that He might offer up His life as a ransom for us on the tree of the holy cross. So, our Lord came to us first in His incarnation.

We also contemplate the way that our Lord + Jesus comes to us in the present. He comes to us by giving us a Kingdom of Grace. His Kingdom of Grace is the Word and the Sacraments. Those things that make and sustain Christians through the work of the Holy Ghost. He creates faith and life in all those who believe on and cling to these means of grace for their salvation. For these means impart to us the gifts of Heaven, especially forgiveness of our sins. And where there is forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation follow behind closely. Therefore, our Lord comes to us daily and often, especially when we gather together as the Body of Christ to receive His gifts of Word and Sacrament. This coming of our Lord + Jesus will occur until we are called out of this vale of tears to our eternal home, or our Lord + Jesus returns on the Last Day to take us to the Kingdom which He has prepared for us in Heaven.

That brings us to the third way our Lord + Jesus comes to us in the Advent season. We look forward to the coming of our Lord in the future. He will come to judge both the quick and the dead, and give an eternal reward to all those who believe on His Name. There are some who would split this final way our Lord + Jesus comes to us into two ways, so that their OCD is satisfied, for there would then be four ways our Lord comes and four Sundays in Advent. They split this final future aspect of our Lord's coming into our Lord coming to us at our death, and our Lord coming to us on the Last Day for the final judgment. But these are in essence the same thing, for we focus on our Lord coming to us to restore finally His Kingdom, and take us and all saints and believers to our eternal home in Heaven.

This is the coming of our Lord that is the focus of today's Gospel reading from the Apostle and Evangelist St. Matthew. On Palm Sunday we look at the historical aspect. Today, we look at the spiritual aspect of this text. For, this arrival of our Lord + Jesus triumphantly into Jerusalem is a picture of Heaven. It is a foreshadowing of things to come. In eternity—in our eternal life in Heaven—we will eternally sing "Hosannas!" to the Lord. We will rejoice that He has come to us, both that He came as a baby in a manger at Bethlehem, and that He comes to us daily in His means of grace. We will rejoice that He has come to bring us to our eternal home where we will join with all the saints and angels and sing the eternal Liturgy of the Lamb in His Kingdom.

We are joined by the saints and angels every time we gather around our Lord's altar, but they are invisible to us, and it is easy for us to forget that we are surrounded by such a glorious crowd of witnesses of our Lord's grace and mercy. But in Heaven they will not be invisible to us, we will see the myriads upon myriads of all those who did not love their life in this world, but clung in hope to the life of the world to come, even as we do this day. We will go to meet our Bridegroom, with palms and olive branches and sing "Hosannas." We will put off our garments of sin and shame and put on the garments of our Lord's righteousness. We will be clothed in white robes, even as we are this day through our Holy Baptism. The New Jerusalem, the holy city, will be adorned as a Bride on her wedding day, and her Bridegroom will come in victory.

A one thing will be different, though. Our Lord + Jesus will not come lowly, and humbly and sitting on the colt of a donkey. He will come in all of His glory and might. His power will not be masked, but will shine like the sun for all eternity. And we will be there in the throng of myriads, holding our palm branches and dressed in white robes, singing of all the wonderful things that our Lord + Jesus, the Christ has done for us. He has rescued us from the power of sin, death and the devil, and has called us away from eternal darkness away from His presence to be with Him for all eternity.

As we reflect upon our Lord's future coming to us, we prepare for His coming. The five wise virgins prepared to meet the Bridegroom by bringing along extra oil in their flasks, so that they would not be found to be without oil. We prepare as well. And this season of Advent—this penitential season—gives us an ample opportunity to do that. These penitential seasons of Advent and Lent serve as our bi-annual reminder that we cannot save ourselves; that we are full of sin and shame. This is why it is a good time to do like the crowds in today's Gospel reading and put off our garments—our garments of sin and shame—and lay them before our Lord + Jesus.

Put off the sins that you bear. This is why we offer Private Confession, especially during these penitential seasons, so that you may unburden yourself of your sins, and receive the absolution from the Pastor as if from God Himself. In the absolution you are reminded of the white robe that you possess—that was given to you in your Holy Baptism—the white robe of our Lord's righteousness. You bear His works and merits. You have put on Christ. Your garment of sin and shame has been removed, and it is cast under our Lord to be trampled by Him.

He has clothed you with the righteousness that for which He came; the righteousness of His perfect obedience to the Law and will of God, and the righteousness of His innocent suffering and

death. His works are now your works. His payment of sin is now your payment of sins. In your Holy Baptism you are given His white robe of righteousness, so that in this season of Advent we can remember that we have put off the old garments of sin and shame, and we now wear the white robe of His righteousness. He has come to us. He has drew near to us, His holy city, so that He might take us from this vale of tears to Himself in Heaven. He has prepared for us salvation, and He now prepares for us an eternal home in Heaven.

We get a foretaste of this reality every time we gather at this altar to receive our Lord's Body and Blood in bread and wine. He draws near to us with His Body and Blood in bread and wine so that we might remember His death, and receive forgiveness of our sins, and eternal life and salvation. This is a foretaste of the eternal wedding feast in our Lord's Kingdom. There the Lamb that was slain for those who believe on Him, will reign for all eternity. And we will rejoice eternally that He has spoken His Word of salvation into our ears; preaching to us His promises that will be ours for all eternity.

As we enter into a new Church's year, we hear about our Lord coming to us. We get to see a picture of the triumphal procession that our Lord will eternally perform as we see our Lord enter into Jerusalem in triumph to the shouts of the crowds—the "Hosannas" that they proclaim. We today, and every Sunday, also sing "Hosanna" when we sing the Sanctus. When we sing these words, we are placing ourselves in those crowds of Palm Sunday. We are reminded at the beginning of the Church's year, that we are indeed a part of the crowds of Heaven. Our Lord + Jesus is coming for us. He is drawing near to the holy city; He is drawing near to us His beloved Bride—the Church. He comes to take us from this valley of tears to our eternal home in Heaven. Rejoice with me, my dear children, that we wear the white robes of our Lord's righteousness, and we will join the eternal throng when our Lord + Jesus calls us to our eternal home. May the Lord + Jesus, the Christ, grant this unto us all. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Awaken us, Lord God, that we may be ready when Thy Son cometh to receive Him with gladness and serve Thee with a pure heart, through the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, Who liveth, and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!