

“CELEBRATING A PROPER ADVENT”
Sermon for the First Sunday in Advent, December 1, 2024
St. John Lutheran Church, Massillon, Ohio

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.”*

The Christian Church is always one step ahead of the world. When God is leading the way, that is the way it is. Today in this sanctuary, we celebrate New Year’s Day, one month before those folks out there do!

And why not? God is the Creator of time and space, the Divine Planner for humankind. For He has lavished His love so that His love would be lavished on each other and the world and towards Him.

Of course, we know that man and woman did not keep up their end of the deal. Alien sin polluted their hearts, a condition which could only be corrected by God’s mercy. And so God promised to send a Savior to redeem them by a tremendous sacrifice that would atone for all sin, and He would place a new heart in them, restoring the relationship between Creator and creature.

This is a thumbnail sketch of our salvation by God the Father who sent His only-begotten Son so that those who believe in Him would not perish but have eternal life.

Thus, the days of our lives by the saving death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are now dedicated to Him and also centered in Him.

So, on this Lord’s Day, we observe the First Sunday in Advent, the beginning of the new Church Year. On your home calendar, this is December 1st, 2024 AD. AD stands for “*Anno Domini*,” which in Latin means “*the Year of the Lord*.” Yes!

The Church Year begins with the season of Advent, about four weeks leading up to Christmas.

Our secular neighbors do not observe Advent. For them, it is only Christmas, and the extraneous trappings that have little to do with the future work of the Babe in the manger in Bethlehem.

And so their Christmas began – when? It seems that it starts the day after Halloween! So the pop culture quickly got their outdoor and indoor decorations in place, and the seasonal songs are already heard on the radio and in stores.

Alas, the world’s version of Christmas has very little to do anymore with the real Christmas. It is patently an artificial Christmas, a pale imitation of the real thing. Their Christmas is not “*Christ Mass*,” neither about Christ nor Mass, which is really what this sacred day is about.

No, the world’s Christmas is about shopping for the latest electronic gadgets and listening to “*Santa Baby*” on the radio. Not much about the Jesus “*baby*.” Almost nothing about Him coming in the flesh to be the Savior of the world.

And we hear almost nothing at all about going to church to celebrate His birth on the Feast of Christmas. But the world has this other Christmas out there, the artificial Christmas, which dominates the airwaves and the pop culture around us.

Now, I have some sentimental feelings for some of the Christmas festivities that many love, but it is necessary to have the right perspective for this holy season. And it is hard to keep that stuff separate from the real reason for the Christmas season. And it is important that the secular Christmas not get in the way of the real Christmas.

So, my friends, do not let that stuff get in the way of your Advent, either.

The world's Christmas has so overshadowed the Advent season that hardly anyone knows what Advent really is about, let alone how to observe it.

But that is not the case in the church. Let Advent be Advent! This season has its own special and specific emphases. If we rushed by Advent and sailed into Christmas, we would be missing some important people and events, let alone God's Advent promises.

Actually, the Advent season began after our first parents left Eden, which means that the whole Old Testament era is Advent until Jesus' birth!

So let us travel through Advent and then, when Christmas appears, let us celebrate big-time – from Christmas Eve and merrily through the twelve days of Christmas.

So, we have entered through the door of Advent, and we will stay here until it ends. And we will observe a proper Advent!

Now Advent is a time of preparation for Christmas, so there are some hints around us here in church that Christmas is on the way. We have put up two trees here in the chancel, but we have not turned on the lights nor decorated the trees. We put up four beautiful blue Advent banners that strike the theme of the season.

And speaking of lights, we have set up the Advent wreath, with one pink and three blue candles, and lighting one candle each week for the four weeks until we reach Christmas. At that time we will light four white candles and the large white middle "*Christ candle*."

So these decorations adorning our sanctuary tell us that Christmas is on the way. But it is not here yet.

And our worship service has a distinct Advent flavor to it. You noticed that we did not sing the "*Gloria in Excelsis*," the main canticle after the Absolution, because this is the song of the Christmas angels, sung at Jesus' birth – and it is not Christmas yet.

Instead, we sang the familiar Advent hymn, "*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*," the solemn prayer crying out for the advent of the Messiah.

Talking about the color blue, we have adorned the altar, pulpit, and lectern with blue paraments. "*Blue*" is the color of hope. During Advent, we look forward with hope to Christ's coming at Christmas, as well as His coming again on the Last Day.

Advent is also a penitential season, sort of a little Lent, a time for sincere repentance for our sins as we await the Lord's coming. As we will see over the next two weeks, John the Baptist plays a prominent role in this Advent call to repentance, preparing the way of the Lord before him.

So this is Advent, a special season unto its own, worthy of our due attention. And today is the First Sunday in Advent. Now there is something about this day that may puzzle you. Today's Gospel is about Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem ...

But that is Palm Sunday, isn't it? Why a Passion reading on the First Sunday in Advent?

Well, consider what the word "*Advent*" means – "*coming*." Advent is the season in which we prepare for Christ's coming into the world.

Advent is the season when we see Jesus coming to be with us – and we praise Him for it! This is exactly what happens on Palm Sunday!

Yes, Jesus is coming to Jerusalem as the King, as the Messiah sent from God, and the people praise Him as He draws near: *“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

This is the same Jesus who comes to us on this First Sunday in Advent, and really, throughout the entire church year; and finally, who will come for us on the Last Day.

Why do we need a King who comes to us like this? Because He comes in the name of the Lord! God has sent this King from heaven to establish the Kingdom of heaven here on earth.

This is what Jesus’ ministry was all about, to bring the Kingdom and His reign to spread the blessings of heaven among us.

In His preaching, Jesus announces the arrival of this Kingdom. *“Repent,”* He says, *“for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”*

Repentance is warranted because of our sinfulness, our tendency to mess things up, in our minds and in our words and deeds directed at others. We do not live according to God’s good design.

So it is well that we not only recognize our flaws but also confess our sins to God so that we may receive the sweet forgiveness of sins and be fortified to serve Him and others in His Kingdom as we have been called by Him to do.

And so, like the crowds in Jerusalem, we hail Him as our King as He rides humbly on a donkey.

And this Son of the Father will lower Himself even further as He obeys His Father who sent Him to do the grandest kingly job of all in a most surprising way – riding into Jerusalem to suffer and die.

But this is how the Kingdom of God comes about – through Jesus Christ coming into Jerusalem to suffer and die for you and me. *“Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation.”*

And how much we need this King! Our sins separate us from God and His Kingdom, unable to be righteous on our own before Him. As we prayed earlier in the Prayer of the Day, we need to be *“rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by the Lord’s mighty deliverance.”*

And this is exactly what King Jesus brings when He rides into town!

Your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation. As Jeremiah prophesied in the first lesson: *“In those days and at that time [God] will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.”*

Jesus is the wholly righteous One who is able to fulfill God’s promise. And so He willingly carried His cross to Calvary’s hill with our sins on His back and died a sinner’s death so that His righteousness would be applied to all sinners!

And Jesus’ resurrection proves it! Our Baptism into Christ unites us to Him and His Kingdom. And so we too will rise from the dead when He returns. So we can trust in Him for all our days, including everlasting life in His Kingdom!

“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!” These words are similar to what we sing in our Communion liturgy. This is no accident. We sing *“Hosanna in the highest”* to our King just before He comes to us with His saving forgiveness, as He gives us His royal body and blood in the holy Sacrament.

Yes, there is a joyous Advent as Christ our King comes to us in the Divine Service, righteous and having salvation!

And so we respond just like the crowd in Jerusalem, joyfully shouting, *“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

To worship and adore God to the heights is in our DNA, and in true faith we are compelled to praise our King who comes and lives in our midst! We sing hymns with our voices and praise His holy Name after the Spirit passes the Gospel through our ears straight into our minds and hearts to strengthen our faith.

So let us praise our King for His coming at Christmas. We praise Him for His coming into

Jerusalem to suffer and die and rise again on our behalf. We praise Him for His coming among us here, bestowing His blessings in Word and Sacrament. And we praise Him, knowing that He will come again at the end, to raise us up to eternal life.

This is how we celebrate a proper Advent – with expectation and hope, a life of repentance that will change how we live. We anticipate Christ coming to us through the eyes of faith. And so we live a life of worship singing, *“Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

Advent: *“Prepare. Hope. Repentance. Praise.”*

Despite the Christmas hustle and bustle surrounding us and nudging us to jump right in, I invite you to absorb the special blessings of a proper Advent season, with the extra midweek services, the stimulating Advent devotional booklets, and hymns that cry out, *“Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

In the Name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit! Amen.

– Pastor John L. Telloni