

Your King Comes to You

William Cwirla

Matthew 21:1–11

Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden. Zechariah 9:9

It's the beginning of Advent, the start of the new church year, the time of preparation before Christmas and Epiphany. Advent means "coming" or arrival, as in the arrival of a king. "Behold, your King is coming to you." Get ready, here he comes.

The season of Advent looks both forward and backward. Backward to Jesus' first coming in humility – a Virgin mother, a manger crib, a home in Nazareth, no place to lay His head, the suffering Servant, a cross. And forward to Jesus' second coming in glory – the shout from heaven, the archangel's trumpet, the clouds, the judgment, the resurrection, the power and the glory. Today we do a bit of both, a kind of "back to the future" look at Jesus' appearing as our King in His kingdom.

The reading from Isaiah looks to the latter days, when the mountain of the Lord's house will be lifted high and exalted, when all the nations will flow into it, when people will say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." That time is now, the time of the Church, which is God's holy mountain exalted in Christ, as all nations come to the house of the God of Jacob to be baptized into the greater Son of Jacob, to be taught the way of salvation in Jesus.

And yet there is a notion of "not yet" here. Not yet does Jesus judge between the nations. Not yet do people beat their weapons into farm implements. Nation still rises up against nation, the art of war remains in practice, though the rules of engagement seem to have changed a bit. Now is not the time of peace but of war and rumors of war and nation against nation.

that great mountain that Isaiah saw, which is heavenly Jerusalem, is still hidden under the cloak of weakness – a church divided, heresies, sects, corruption, hardly the picture of the "highest of the mountains." But not yet. Give it time. Give it to the end of time when the time of faith will end and the time of seeing will begin. And then you too will see with your own

eyes what God has been up to all along in, with, under this history. And the sight will be glorious. But not yet.

Behold, your King comes to you. Did you find it strange to hear the Palm Sunday Gospel on this Sunday? It does sound a bit strange! It seems out of context. We think of the start of Holy Week, not the start of Advent. Yet there is a profound point here. The last time Jesus the King was seen riding into His city it was in humility, riding a beggar King atop a borrowed donkey. It happened to fulfill what the prophet Zechariah had said as he looked forward to see the Messiah King ride to take His throne. And the people that gathered that day were probably itching for a riot if not a revolution. The last thing they expected is what happened at the end of the week when Jesus the King was enthroned on a cross and crucified. Not exactly much of a holy war, was it?

But it was! It was the ultimate and only holy war that mattered, and the Jesus the King fought it Himself singlehandedly. He came to die. He came to lay down His life. He is the King who dies for His subjects, who rescues them, who comes to them. You don't come to this King, you don't seek Him out. He seeks you out and comes to you. And yes, He comes humbly and hiddenly, not the sort of King you might expect, much less the kind of God you would expect. He comes in the seemingly weak and hidden way of baptismal water, communion bread and wine, absolving words, and office of the ministry. He comes now as He did then, humbly and rejectably. You can turn your back on Him. You can mock Him as so many still do. You can spit on Him and beat Him and seem to get away with it.

Don't mistake that humility for weakness. His power is perfected in what appears to be weakness. His victory comes out of what appears to be defeat. His holy war is won not by killing the enemy but by dying at the hands of the enemy. Contrast that with the wars of today, with the kings of this world, with the holy wars waged in the name of God. There is no comparison. There is none like Jesus, nor is there a need to look for another. He's the crucified, risen, and reigning One, and one of Him is enough for the world.

Our problem is we want it all now. We can't abide the "not yet." We want Christmas now instead of Advent. We want glory now instead of suffering. We want heaven now instead of this life. We want everything by sight instead of by faith. We grow impatient, distracted, doubting. The world either thinks we're quaint or crazy, we who believe in a coming day of glory, much the way the cartoon characters in Charles Schultz' Peanuts mocked Linus for his watching for the coming of the Great Pumpkin.

I hope you still know that Peanuts special; I know it's old, introduced 2 years after I was born. Just in case, let me fill you in. A little boy named Linus sits in his pumpkin patch every year awaiting the arrival of the Great Pumpkin who invariably fails to appear. Yet no matter how humiliated and disappointed Linus is every year, he stubbornly vows he will keep his vigil next Halloween for the arrival of the Great Pumpkin.

Advent can seem that way in our modern world. Waiting for the arrival of Jesus who never seems to show up, we're like Linus, waiting and watching in childlike faith for someone whom we have never seen and who has promised to appear in glory one day. It sounds almost silly to say it. But remember these are the words of the One who died and rose from the dead. Sane, rational, and skeptical people heard Him and believed it. Every generation of Christian has sat in his pumpkin patch awaiting the coming of the Lord in glory. And Advent comes year after year with the same prayer, "Stir up your power, O Lord, and come."

Advent is a time of patient watching and waiting. Our epistle reading gives us the image of early morning, just before the alarm goes off. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. You open one eye, it's still dark, but there is a hint of light on the horizon. You want to roll over and go back to sleep, but it's time to wake up. Get ready. Your King is coming to you. Salvation is nearer now than when you first believed. Nearer this year than at the start of Advent a year ago.

How then are we to live as we watch and wait for the Day to appear? What are you waiting for, darkness or light? Condemnation or salvation? You are baptized. You have been clothed with Christ. You are children of the light and of the Day. Drunkenness, immorality, quarreling, jealousy – those things don't befit baptized children of the day. You are clothed with Jesus, His righteousness, His holiness. Wear it. Forget about the desires of the flesh, your sinful self. Don't indulge it, it's dead and it means death to you. You're about life and light.

So even as world lives in darkness and practices the works of darkness, you've been called to live in the day even while it is still night knowing that the dawn has come with Jesus and the day is not far off. That's the spirit of this season we call Advent. It's not about shopping and parties, though there will be that, There are Christmas expectations to live up to, after all. But Advent would set our eyes on the horizon, on the rising sun, on the coming King, on the mountain of the Lord. Behold, your King comes to you.

Once He came; soon He comes.

Once He came by way of a Virgin mother; soon He comes with the angels.

Once He came by way of the crib and cross; soon He comes with the glory of heaven

Once He came riding atop a borrowed donkey; soon He comes with clouds descending

Once He came as a beggar King; soon He comes as the King of kings.

Once He came to die; soon He comes to raise the dead.

Once He came in weakness; soon He comes in power.

Once He came to be judged; soon He comes to judge.

Once He came to save us; soon He comes to give us salvation.

Come, Lord Jesus!

In the name of Jesus,

Amen

SOURCE

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