

First Sunday In Advent.

Matthew 21:1-9

And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. And if any man say aught unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, and brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. — Matt. 21:1-9

The Jews had many beautiful and glorious promises concerning the Messiah or Christ, how He should appear on earth, establish an everlasting kingdom, redeem His people from all evil, and help them forever; as we see in all the writings of the prophets, that they speak beyond measure gloriously concerning the future kingdom of Christ. And these writings were well known to the Jews. But false preachers and carnal teachers arose, who taught the people the opinion, which they gladly received and to which their hearts were inclined, that Christ would come in worldly glory, and make an entry in power, as other worldly kings are accustomed to do, so that everything should be most grand and gorgeous; that He would make the

Jews powerful princes and rulers all over the world; as they think even today, that when their Messiah shall come, they shall be lords of all the world, and the heathens their servants. After such a Messiah or Christ they are still gaping, but do not long for the Messiah, i. e. the Lord Christ, that He should deliver them from sin and eternal death.

That the Jews might be warned and not permit themselves to be deceived by such carnal teachers, God long before proclaimed in plain words through the prophet Zechariah that Christ would not come as a temporal king in great pomp and splendor, but that He would enter Jerusalem, in which, as the capital of the country, was the temple and its service, without all worldly grandeur, riding upon an ass, as the Gospel relates.

And that the Jews might not excuse themselves and say: If we had known that He would come in such poverty, we would have looked for it and received Him, the prophet told them this very clearly so long a time before. And the event took place in the full light of day, that the Savior rode upon the borrowed ass, without saddle or anything else, the apostles laying their clothes upon it, so that the poor king could sit thereon.

Therefore the Jews can by no means excuse themselves. For here is clear and plain prophecy: When Christ shall ride into Jerusalem, He will not come, as worldly kings are wont, on a proud steed, clothed in armor, with implements of war, but He will come, as the Evangelist says, meek, or as the prophet terms it, lowly. It is as if the prophet would thus warn everyone, saying: Mark well the ass, and know that He who comes on it is the true Messiah. Therefore, beware; do not look for a golden crown, sumptuous apparel or costly ornaments, or any great display. For Christ will come poor, with a meek and lowly heart, and will not be seen otherwise than riding upon an ass. This is all the pomp and glory He will show the world at His entry into Jerusalem.

This prophecy induced our Lord now to make this entry, and He attaches much importance to it. Therefore He also gives the disciples such strict command about this matter; and will not enter Jerusalem by night, or secretly, but openly in the full light of day; not alone, but in the midst of a great multitude of people going before and following after, calling aloud to Him as the true Son of David, and wishing Him great prosperity in His kingdom. Jerusalem must know of this entry, must see and hear the ass and

this poor King, concerning whom Zechariah had prophesied, warning the Jews not to be offended at His poverty and humble entry, but to dismiss their idea that Christ would come with great worldly pomp. He will indeed be a king, says Zechariah, but a humble, poor king, who has nothing of the appearance of a king, judging by the outward pomp which worldly kings and princes usually show before men.

On the other hand, says Zechariah, this poor and humble King will have a power greater than that of all emperors and kings who have ever lived on earth, great as their power may have been. For He is called *Justus et Salvator*. Not a rich, noble and mighty king before the world, but the Just One and Savior, who shall bring with Him righteousness and salvation, attack sin and death, be the enemy of sin and destroyer of death; for He comes for the purpose of saving from sin and eternal death all who believe in Him, receive Him as their king, and are not offended at the poor borrowed ass. Those who receive Him in faith and find their consolation in Him, receive forgiveness of sins, and shall not die, but live forever. And though after their bodies they must die and be buried, it shall be to them, and be called by them, not death, but only a sleep.

This the prophet would teach us of this King, when he gives Him these two glorious, nay divine, titles and names, calling Him the Just One and Savior, who shall rob death of his power, hell of its destruction, tread the devil under His feet, and thus deliver us who believe in Him from sin and death, and introduce us to the society of angels, where there is eternal life and salvation. He leaves other kings in possession of their external government, authority, pomp, castles, houses, money and goods, allows them also to eat, drink, clothe themselves, and build in a more costly manner than other people; but this art they do not understand, this work they cannot do, which this poor and humble King, Christ, understands and does. For no emperor, king or temporal authority, with all their power, can deliver you from one sin, or with their money and goods heal the least disease, much less afford help against eternal death and hell. But this lovely King, Christ, delivers me, not only from one sin, but from all my sins, and not me only, but the whole world. He comes to take away not only sickness, but death, and not only from me, but from the whole world.

This is what the Evangelist desires to have announced to the daughter of Zion from the prophet; not to be offended at His lowly coming, but to close

the eyes and open the ears, that she may not see in what poverty He rides, but hear what is said of this poor King. Reason looks only on this poor and humble form, that He rides upon an ass without saddle or spurs, like a beggar, and is offended at it; but does not see that He can deliver us from sin, destroy death, and give us everlasting holiness, righteousness, eternal salvation and eternal life. Therefore we must tell and proclaim it, that the people may hear and believe. This is what the Evangelist means when he says: "Tell ye the daughter of Zion." Why? In order that she may know it, and not heed, nor be offended at this, that He comes in such poverty and soon after dies ignominiously. For all this takes place for your good, in order that He, as a Savior, may help you against the devil and death, to sanctify and deliver you from sin. Whoever will not receive this with his ears and heart, but would see it with his eyes and feel it with his hands, deprives himself of this King; for it is very different from what we find it with other kings. What they do, they do with pomp, and everything has a grand, imposing appearance. In Christ we do not find this; His office and work is to help us from sin and death, and this He does in no other external manner but through His word and gospel, which He orders to be told and preached to us, and through the signs which He gives besides the promise, through which also He works and shows His power; as that He first plunges us into baptism, where our eyes see nothing but simple water, like other water. Likewise, He has comprehended it in the word we are preaching, where our eyes see nothing but man's breath. But we must beware and not follow our eyes here, but shut our eyes, open our ears and hear the word. This teaches us how our Lord Jesus shed His blood for the forgiveness of our sins, that we might live. These gifts He would bestow upon us in holy baptism, in the Lord's Supper, in the preaching and absolution; there we certainly find them. Now it is true, it seems small matter. that through the washing of water, through the word and sacrament, such great things should be accomplished; but do not let your eyes deceive you. There also it seemed a small matter that He who rode on a borrowed ass, and afterwards suffered Himself to be crucified, should take away sin, death and hell. No one could see it in His appearance; but the prophet says so. Therefore we must simply receive it with our ears, and believe it with our hearts; with our eyes we cannot see it. Hence the Evangelist says, as already mentioned: "Tell ye the daughter of Zion." And the prophet says: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion, behold thy King cometh unto thee," as if he would say: This is told to

you and God wishes to have it proclaimed to you, that you may find consolation in Him by faith, and be defended by such faith against doubt and despair on account of your unworthiness and sins. What is it that is told, and on account of which she is to rejoice? It is this: “Behold thy King cometh unto thee.”

What kind of a king? A holy and just King, a Physician and Savior, or Helper, who would heal and save you. He would give His glory and righteousness to you, that you may be free from your sins; His life also He would lay down for you, that through His death you may be delivered from eternal death. Therefore be not offended at His lowly and humble form, but thank Him for it, and comfort yourself in Him. For all that He does and accomplishes in His coming, is done for your good; thus He would deliver you from your sins and from death, and justify and save you.

This now is our King, the dear Lord Jesus Christ, and this is His kingdom and office. It deals not with golden crowns and kingdoms, or with great worldly pomp; no, but when we must die, and cannot retain this life any longer, then it is His office and work to deliver us from sin, death and the power of hell; and through the preaching of the gospel He announces to us that we shall certainly receive this gift or benefit from Him, so that when we are in trouble on account of our sins, or in danger of death, we can comfort ourselves by faith and say: Now help is afforded me through my dear King, Jesus Christ, the Just One and Savior; to this end He came, so lowly and poor, and suffered Himself to be nailed to the cross, that He might justify and sanctify me; in Himself He hath destroyed my sin and death, gives me His own righteousness and victory over death and hell, and gives me also His Holy Spirit, that I might have in my heart a sure seal and witness of His help. See now, whoever believes this as he hears it, and as it is preached in the gospel, he also has it. For to this end holy baptism was instituted by our Savior that He might clothe you with His righteousness, and that His holiness and innocence should be yours. For we are all poor sinners, but in baptism, and afterwards in our whole life, if we turn unto Christ, He comforts us, and says: Give me your sins and take my righteousness and holiness; let your death be taken from you, and put on my life. This is, properly speaking, the Lord Jesus’ government. For all His office and work is this, that He daily takes away our sin and death, and clothes us with His righteousness and life.

This announcement we should indeed hear with great joy, and every one should thereby be bettered and made more holy. But alas, the contrary is true, and the world grows worse as it grows older, becoming the very Satan himself, as we see that the people are now more dissolute, avaricious, unmerciful, impure and wicked than previously under the papacy. What causes this? Nothing else than that the people disregard this preaching, do not use it aright for their own conversion and amendment, that is, for the comfort of their conscience, and thankfulness for the grace and benefit of God in Christ; but every one is more concerned for money and goods, or other worldly matters, than for this precious treasure which Christ brings us. For the most of us, when we do not feel our misery, the fear of sin and death, would rather, like the Jews, have such a king in Christ as would give us riches and ease here on earth, than that we should comfort ourselves in Him in the midst of poverty, crosses, wretchedness, fear and death. The world takes no delight in this, and because the gospel and Christ do not give it what it desires, it will have nothing to do with Christ and the gospel. Therefore our Lord in turn rebukes this world and says: Do you not rejoice in this, nor thank me, that through the sufferings and death of my only begotten Son, I take away your sins and death? Then I will give you sin and death enough, since you want it so; and where you were possessed of and tormented by only one devil, you shall now be tormented by seven that are worse. We see farmers, citizens and all orders, from the highest to the lowest, guilty of shameful avarice, inordinate life, impurity and other vices. Therefore let every one who would be a Christian be hereby warned as of God himself, joyfully and thankfully to hear and receive this announcement, and also pray to God to give him a strong faith, that he may hold fast this doctrine; then surely the fruit will follow, that he will daily become more humble, obedient, gentle, chaste and pious. For this doctrine is of a character to make godly, chaste, obedient, pious people. But those who will not gladly receive it, become seven times worse than they were before they heard it, as we see everywhere. And the hour will surely come when God will punish this unthankfulness. Then it will appear what the world has merited by it. Now, since the Jews would not obey the prophet, it is told to us that our King comes meek and lowly, in order that we may learn wisdom from their sad experience, and not be offended by His poverty, nor look for worldly pomp and riches, like the Jews; but learn that in Christ we have a King who is the Just One and Savior, and willing to

help us from sin and eternal death. This announcement, I say, we should receive with joy, and with hearty thanks to God, else we must take the devil, with wailing, weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The example of the Apostles and others who here enter in with our Savior, admonishes us to the same. For since the Lord Jesus is a King, He must also have a kingdom or people, and these must render Him, as their King, becoming service. What this service is, this history tells us. For here we find people who acknowledge Christ as King, and are not ashamed to walk by the side of the ass, on which this King rides. Among these the Apostles are the first who acknowledge this Lord as the true Messiah that justifies sinners, and is a Savior from death. Therefore “they bring the ass,” that is, they direct the Jews, who have hitherto lived under the law and borne its burden, to Christ. Besides the ass they bring to Christ also the young colt, the heathen, who were yet unbridled and not under the law. For Christ is a Savior of all men; all preachers and teachers must lead every one to Him. This is one becoming service we should render this King, that we acknowledge, receive, praise and glorify Him as the Just One and Savior, and direct every one to Him.

Another service is that we also “sing hosanna” to this Christ, that is, that we wish prosperity to His kingdom, let our confession of Him be heard publicly, and do everything we can for the growth and promotion of His kingdom. For the word “hosanna” means as much as: “O Lord help, Lord give success to the Son of David,” as we pray also in the Lord’s prayer: “Thy kingdom come.” For the devil and his servants will not fail to make every possible effort to hinder this kingdom, and either to destroy or adulterate the word. We must therefore wish and pray, that God would hinder and repel the will of the devil.

The third is, that we “take our garments and spread them in the way” for the Lord Jesus, which is done when we, to the best of our ability, help the office of the ministry with our money and goods, in order that good, learned and pious men may be educated to teach in the Church; and when we support those who are in this office in such a manner, that they can wait on their office and studies, and not neglect them. In short when we use our money and goods to the end that the offices in the Church may be well filled, and the people provided with good officers, then we spread our garments in the way for Christ, that He may ride along with all the more

honor. Thus we ought to serve the King, and not pay any heed to the High Priests and Pharisees, who look with no favor on this entry with so little pomp and display, and are full of anger and impatience because He is called a King, and received and honored as such, desiring to prevent it if they could. But Christ will not allow them to prevent it. For since He is a King, He must also have His courtiers and court-service. And happy are they who serve Him, for He is a King who will serve us again; yea, He comes for the sole purpose of serving us, not with money and goods, but with righteousness against sin and help against death and eternal damnation.

Therefore we should be ready and willing to serve Him, and pay no heed to the vain talk and example of the pope, bishops and others, who do not, like the Apostles, lead the ass to Christ and set Him thereon, but wish to throw Him off and rule over the people themselves, after their own pleasure, with doctrines of men; who cannot endure it that He should ride with His gospel and be seen or heard. These false teachers also have their disciples, who play the hypocrite for them and strew palm and olive branches in the road before them, but throw stones at Christ; for they persecute His gospel and all who preach it. Such will at last become conscious, with the Jews, that they have despised the just King and Savior, whilst those who have received and confessed Him, and turned their poverty to His service, will receive from Him eternal life and glory.