

“A Beast of Burden”

Matthew 21:1-11

You would think that this being the beginning of the church year, we would start with the beginning. The church year calendar gives us all the pieces to put together to tell the whole story – God’s interaction with His people who believe the promises of old; followed by the fulfillment of those promises in the coming of Christ as the child of Mary; He preaches repentance and the forgiveness of sins; He performs miracles.

There are so many things that happen before He enters Jerusalem where all prophets must die. And it is for this purpose that He came. He came to die. He who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is the Son of God begotten from eternity; is the child born of Mary; is the boy born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth; and is the prophet who stirred the hearts of the people.

But the people on Palm Sunday are still confused. They are still asking the same question, “Who is this?” This is the same question the disciples asked in confusion after Jesus calmed the storm: “Who is this?”

That is a question which every person must answer for themselves. Parents cannot have enough faith to cover for their children. Wives cannot have enough faith to cover for their husbands. As we begin our yearlong journey telling the whole story from the beginning to the Last Day, we need to be able to answer the question: “Who is this?” Who is this man riding into Jerusalem on a beast of burden? A donkey is a beast of burden made to carry the weight that we do not want to or simply cannot carry.

“Behold, your King is coming to you.” When you read the Gospel of Matthew, this is a constant theme. Last week I repeatedly spoke of Jesus as our victorious, glorious King. But where is His victory and His glory? It wasn’t in the praise and shouts of the people. They don’t even know who He is. “Who is this?” they ask. The only answer they have is that He is a prophet from Nazareth – which is a correct answer. However, that would be like me asking “Who is Michael Jordan?” and you tell me that he was a good athlete who got cut from his high school basketball team and that he played minor league baseball for a couple of years – which is a correct answer, but is an answer that is lacking.

There is a reason we confess the Nicene Creed each week. You need to hear the whole story. This prophet from Galilee named Jesus of Nazareth, (for whom by the way there is a mountain of documented evidence outside of the Bible from that time period which mentions Him as

a real historic figure) – who is this man that is riding a colt of a beast of burden?

Entering into the city this way was intentional. It helps to tell the whole story. Riding a donkey is symbolic. If Jesus came riding a horse, it would mean that He came to wage war. Riding a donkey means that He comes in peace; even more, that He has brought peace. A king, having defeated the enemy, entering His city on a donkey is an announcement that victory is complete.

I know you are going to say that I am telling the story all wrong. This is Advent. We should be talking about the days that lead up to Jesus being born. And now I say that Jesus announces His victory on Palm Sunday, before He is crucified. That just seems out of order.

Think back to the times when the people tried to kill Jesus and He passed through the crowd unharmed because “it was not yet His time.” When Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness, there was no risk that Jesus was going to give in and worship him.

Victory was ours when our victorious, glorious King entered the world – and I am not talking about being born in Bethlehem. When the angel Gabriel spoke to that young girl in Nazareth and the Holy Spirit created life in her womb, from that point forward, there was never any doubt that God’s plan of salvation would be complete.

The people all around Him would keep asking in confusion, “Who is this?” But Jesus of Nazareth would enter Jerusalem riding a beast of burden. Jesus of Nazareth would exit Jerusalem as our beast of burden. He would carry the weight that we could not carry – and I am not talking about the weight of the wooden cross. He would carry the weight of the sin of the world.

More and more, I find myself speaking to people who look at Jesus of Nazareth with confusion and ask, “Who is this?” If our current generation truly recognized Him as the Son of God from eternity; who entered this world as the child of Mary to be your beast of burden and carry the weight of sin that you could not carry; if our current generation truly recognized and believed this, the world and our churches would be a very different place. The reality is that they need to hear and believe the whole story.

This time of year, the crowds get stirred up and pictures of Jesus and Mary and Joseph can be seen all around. But the excitement of a crowd never ends the confusion. It tends to add to the confusion, and our confused world continues to ask, “Who is this?”

To give an answer, it is fitting that we begin telling the story by announcing, “Behold, your King is coming to you.” In days of old, He was riding a beast of burden. Now, He is your beast of burden. He came to carry the weight that you cannot carry. There is good news this Advent Season. Behold, your King is coming to you. Amen.