

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Quincy, IL
Rev. Martin Eden

Advent 1
Saturday, December 2, 2023, at 5:00 p.m.
Sunday, December 3, 2023, at 9:00 a.m.

“He Came, He Comes, He is Coming”

Mark 11:1-10

Today is a day for mixed metaphors. Happy New Year!! As I mentioned last week, it is the new Church Year. Advent is upon us, so we get to begin retelling the account of God’s interaction with His people as He prepared the world to receive the Savior. So, of course, our Gospel reading is the story of Palm Sunday. All of this really does fit together. You might say, this time of year has the theme: “He came. He comes. He is coming.”

The new Church Year begins with the preparation for the coming of Christ the first time, as the child of Mary and Joseph – He came. And we have carry-over from our conclusion of the Church Year, with the focus on Christ’s return at the end of time – He is coming. All the while, the people of God gather to receive our Lord as He comes to us under the form of bread and wine. He comes to us in the waters of Baptism. He comes to us in His Word.

The Old Testament is where the Advent season begins. Yes, in the coming weeks we will be discussing persons like John the Baptist and Simeon and Mary and Joseph. But the time of preparation, represented in the season of Advent, began almost in the beginning. After Adam and Eve’s fall into sin, God immediately promises to send the Christ into the world, as is recorded in Genesis

chapter three. The same promise is made to Abraham many years later.

Isaiah, the prophet who lived more than 700 years before Jesus was born, spends good portions of his book prophesying of Christ's coming. And in our Old Testament reading, Isaiah speaks on behalf of the people with a prayer in the form of a psalm. Isaiah persistently pleads on behalf of the people of Israel for mercy. Their sin; their guilt is their own fault, and God is completely justified in being angry with them.

But if you keep on reading into the next chapter of Isaiah, you will see that this is actually a very daring approach in that he is complaining that God has taken the people's perverse, sinful resistance to His mercy as an opportunity to harden their hearts as He did Pharaoh's in Egypt.

Isaiah is right – and this isn't the only place where God does this. Paul speaks of the Lord doing this in his letter to the Romans. God allowing people to remain hardened in their hearts so that others see this as a warning is not wrong on God's part. Sin is always the fault of the sinner.

It was not God's fault that Pharaoh was a sinful, selfish, unbeliever. He was born spiritually a blind, dead, enemy of God, and the Lord allowed the evil in Pharaoh's heart to remain so that all the world would know that it was God and God alone who rescued His people Israel from the bondage of slavery – “with a mighty hand and outstretched arm” as Scripture says repeatedly throughout the Old Testament.

In Isaiah's day, the people of Israel had sold themselves back into the slavery of sin. They certainly still “worshiped” the Lord in regard to outward acts, but they were limping along with one foot in the church and the other in the

open sewer of sin and idol worship.

It's very much like our Western society where God is "worshiped" with one foot in the church (sometimes hardly even a big toe), but the mind and body is elsewhere. In Israel, once again, just like with Pharaoh in Egypt, the Lord allowed those who dared to be His enemy to provide their own punishment in that God said, "OK, you're on your own." And eventually Israel met a disastrous end when the Babylonians came, destroyed Jerusalem, burned the temple to the ground and carried the people off into exile for seventy years.

All this was done so that, once again, it would be known that God and God alone has saved His people. As Isaiah says, and St. Paul later reiterates, "all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" – the proverbial "filthy rags" of which Paul speaks... [and Paul elsewhere again quotes Isaiah] we are the clay, you are our potter." We are nothing without the Lord. As Isaiah also says, "without Him our sin sweeps us away as the wind blows a dry leaf."

Again, more mixed metaphors. But the reality of what all these metaphorical images we see in Scripture mean is that there is but one King and one Redeemer. One Messiah would come and bear the sin of Adam, and Abraham, even Pharaoh, and Isaiah, Paul, Mary and Joseph, John the Baptist, and you and me. He would be born of a virgin and they would call him Immanuel – which means "God with us."

The coming of Christ is the answer to Isaiah's prayer for God to "rend the heavens and come down." It took 700 years for the prayer to be answered. By the time Christ came, most people had given up hope for the Son of God to enter the world as Isaiah foretold. But He came.

Like these weeks of Advent, the Old Testament era was a time of preparation for the coming of the Messiah. It was time to get ready. It was time to anticipate and prepare. He is coming. But our preparation and celebration is not just for the nostalgia of the Christ-child coming at Christmas.

He came, and for this we celebrate. But there is a reason we sometimes read the Palm Sunday text on the first Sunday of Advent. It is not just a foreshadowing of what that Christ-child would grow up to become – the Messiah entering into Jerusalem to be the sacrificial Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

But we need to hear those words, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” We sing those words in the “Sanctus” as we prepare to receive Christ’s body and blood. He comes to us.

This season is not just of misty-eyed nostalgia about nativity scenes and family gatherings and presents under the tree. Yes, He certainly came as the child of Mary in Bethlehem. But blessed is He who comes, and continues to come to His people in body and blood, just as He came into this world with flesh and blood as that child in Bethlehem.

He came; He comes; and He is coming. We continue our preparation for the Lord’s return, which is also a part of the Advent celebration. We pray the prayer of Isaiah that the Lord soon would rend the heavens and come down, and we know that all will be accomplished according to His will and in His time. Until that time we continue to say, “Come, Lord Jesus”, and “Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.” Amen.