

How Shall I Greet You?

**St. Mark Lutheran
Advent-two services**

**Pastor Ken Welsh
Wednesday, Nov. 30**

Preparation: Read Matt. 21:1-11 in regard to Christ's entry into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday).

Advent is a special season before we celebrate Christmas. In our busy lives, we try to take some extra time to think about things we are usually too busy to think about. Advent is a season where we think about all the ways our Lord has come to us, continues to come, and will come. To be more precise, he comes to us through the spoken word and the written word; he comes to us through the waters of baptism and through the Holy Supper; he comes to us through birth and through ministry and he will, on that last Great Day, come to us in glory at the consummation of all things.

Our homily is based on mostly on Matthew 21:1-11. In this chapter, Matthew gives a description of our Lord's entry into Jerusalem. I find it amazing that you can read something over and over and think you really understand it and then find you missed something after all. I read this part of scripture many times until I discovered I had missed something. I am told this often happens to people. I discovered that almost everything that we think about happening on that day which we call Palm Sunday actually happens before Jesus enter the city.

More to the point, there are crowds. There are people shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David!" There are people flinging coats and strewing branches all over the place to rightfully honor Jesus. This was a big event with them. Who were these people? In all likelihood, they were part of the crowds who had been following Jesus. Many of them had been traveling with him, some all the way from Galilee. Many had probably seen him do great miracles, and they thought they knew exactly who he was.

But, and this is what is easy to miss, there were two crowds there that day. The crowd shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" was not composed of the people from Jerusalem. Jerusalem's cry was not "Blessed is he!" They had no idea who Jesus was. We know that from verses 10-11 which say, "When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?' And the crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'"

Now the prophet Zechariah had foretold the coming of the king to Jerusalem. He had spoken of the time when a simple donkey would be the preferred animal of the day.. The prophet Malachi had promised that one day the Lord would suddenly appear in his temple. And still, Jerusalem was not ready. Jerusalem was oblivious to the signs of the times. The Lord came to his city, his temple, but

his own people did not know him or rejoice to receive him.

But as Matthew 26:24 says, the Son of Man went on as it was written about him. Even though Jerusalem was not ready with a proper welcome, with the kind of greeting he deserved, still he came. The way was not easy. The path was not smooth. But still Jesus came, and he accomplished what he came to do, to die for us that our sins might be forgiven.

Paul Gerhardt captures the significance of this Palm Sunday and Christ's entrance into Jerusalem in hymn # 334 of our Lutheran service book, "O Lord, How Shall I Meet You?"

Pay particular attention to the first stanza, which concludes with a kind of prayer, saying, "O kindle, Lord most holy, Your lamp within my breast, To do in spirit lowly, All that may please you best."

So I ask, do you want Advent to have real meaning for you this year as you prepare to celebrate Christmas? Do you want it to have real purpose in your life? Well, then, I would suggest that we start here, with asking the Lord to kindle or rekindle his light within us, that we might be ready to properly greet him; that we might faithfully proclaim to a unprepared world what Christmas is all about; that we might be willing, to find spiritual ways to show to those around us that Jesus Christ is the Savior and only hope of the world.

And I would pray that the Lord would not only help us in our preparation for Christmas, but that we would be prepared for that great Day of the Lord, when not just Jerusalem but heaven and earth shall be shaking, when the tribes of the earth are mourning and the Son of Man comes on the clouds of heaven with his mighty angels. May he prepare us properly to greet him with a heart made new by him and with an eager anticipation to see what he has prepared for his people in eternity. When the sun is darkened, and the moon has changed color, and trumpets are sounding and stars are falling, he will come to gather his people from all over the earth. May our voices then echo those words said so many times before: "Blessed be the name of the Lord!" Amen.