

Ad Te Levavi  
St. Matthew 21:1-9

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The closing words we heard Jesus speak last week were, "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming." (Matthew 25:13) Therein lies the promise and prediction of Jesus' second Advent—His second appearing on earth, coming in judgment. Jesus would not have told His followers to watch were He not intending to return—that's His promise. And the prediction is that no one will know either the day or the hour of His return; even Jesus doesn't know, as He said elsewhere. (cf. Mark 13:32)

The word that follows, "Watch," is, "Prepare." It's the ensign for this season of Advent. We're at the time of year when we prepare to celebrate, once again, the first Advent of the Son of God, ever mindful of His impending second Advent; preparing—or, more properly, being prepared, by receiving from Him all that He has to give, watching and waiting for, anticipating and expecting Jesus to return and judge the world.

In a way, you could say that those who waited for His first coming had it easier. Throughout the Old Testament are passages that point to that coming, predicting it, saying exactly what it would look like, and what the life and death of Immanuel (cf. Isaiah 7:14) would look like. The prophets, left and right, promised God's people on His oath that He would redeem them, that He would come to them, that He would cleanse them from their sins; and right there in Isaiah, the One through whom this would happen would be called Immanuel—God-with-us. God made His coming impossible to miss, though not necessarily obvious.

Of the coming of the Son of God, the prophet Micah wrote, "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting." (Micah 5:2) The little town of Bethlehem would be the birth town of Immanuel, but it was such an insignificant little town that the people overlooked it. It is the way God works, however, choosing the insignificant and lowly among the people of earth—building a nation from among slaves, picking a young, small shepherd as king from whose line the Son of God would be born, being born in that little city of David, born of a young, lowly maiden unknown to the rest of the world, to be cared for by a carpenter that even we know little about—always the least, smallest, most insignificant...in a word: humble.

So it went, that after Jesus was born, wise men from the east visited Jerusalem, assuming the King of kings to have been born there, seeking the child. They visited Herod, who inquired of the chief priests and scribes where the Christ was to be born, who quoted to him this passage from Micah. (cf. Matthew 2:1-6) Now, it doesn't say if they took some time to search and research the Scriptures for this passage, but their response after finding the information is telling.

What was that response? They couldn't be bothered with it. These all remained in Jerusalem, as if the fulfillment of Scripture didn't matter—understandable, I suppose, for the foreigner Herod. Herod sent the wise men to investigate and report back, secretly desiring to kill the Infant who was a threat to his position on the throne, on which he really didn't belong in the first place.

This is how Jesus, the Son of God, was received throughout His 30-odd years. Some received Him as the Scriptures had promised; many denied Him and saw Him as a threat to their way of life—their way of death, more appropriately. Even into Jesus' last days, the people cheered or jeered Him, even as He hung dying on the cross.

Today's text has Him riding into Jerusalem to assume His crown and throne, but it's no typical crown or throne. He is greeted as royalty, but it's no typical pomp and circumstance that He receives.

He rides into town victorious, but it's no typical victory that He has (or will) win, nor typical royal sedan that He rides in on.

His crown is thorns—the sign of the curse from way back in Genesis. (cf. Genesis 3:18) His throne is a cross, a cursed (cf. Galatians 3:13) instrument of torture and death. The pomp and circumstance are shouts of “Hosanna!” accompanied by palm branches and people’s cloaks. His sedan is a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey. His victory is one over sin, death, and the devil, won by His coronation and enthronement, suffered under the wrath of God once for all in your place. He dies a death of a common criminal, as an enemy of peace and good order in the community, in order to cleanse you from all sinfulness, grant you peace with God, and place you in the community of the saints of God. Jesus birth and life were humble, and His death also a humble one; but this is the way God works and accomplishes His greatest good for you.

This, too, was predicted by the Law and the Prophets. Today’s Gospel text quotes from Jeremiah. (cf. Jeremiah 9:9) It is Isaiah that equates the death of the Son of God to a lamb, silent before its shearers, opening not its mouth on the way to the slaughter—a humble, humiliating death. (cf. Isaiah 53:7) Is it any wonder that John the Baptizer points to Jesus and calls Him the Lamb of God? (cf. John 1:29) Jesus coming to His people—to His coronation—happened just as Zechariah had said. Jesus went to His passion and death just as Isaiah had said, even as John had reinforced.

The Word of God declared that His coming and redemption would look humble, not to expect the grandiose, royal, over-the-top coming that one would expect with the coming of God to His people. There is a reason for this, and it is simply because such an entrance would give a false impression of what His coming was for. When Jesus came to restore the kingdom to Israel, it wasn’t to overthrow some political entity, but to free His people from their sins. How does that look? Death and resurrection, as the Author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, “[W]ithout the shedding of blood there is no remission.” (Hebrews 9:22) Such an act would topple no kingdom, except that of sin, death, and the devil. Any other way, any other entrance, would be cause for flesh to find glory in its own works and merits, according to its own standards and judgments, in the presence of God. As St. Paul wrote,

But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption—that, as it is written, “He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.” (1 Corinthians 1:27-31)

The coming of Jesus today is still just as humble as it was when He rode into Jerusalem. For you was applied a bit of water as the Word of God was spoken, and you are Baptized and given the benefits of Jesus’ humble death and burial, the remission of your sins, and His glorious and victorious resurrection, life eternal in the presence of God. In your hearing is spoken simple words: “You are forgiven,” and they give to you exactly what they say. To you is given a piece of unleavened bread, as tasty as a cracker, and some cheap wine, and they are for you the very body and blood of the Son of God, to bring you forgiveness, life, and salvation.

To this day, these humble means of God are rejected and denied as people still expect for God to come in some great display of power because word, water, bread, and wine are just too finite or simple for God to use for His great purpose. These espouse a theology of glory, which even your Old Man falls prey to again and again, as even you look, every once and again, for God to work in glory and power, triumph and majesty, pomp and circumstance, when no eye can deny or ear reject.

However, by the shedding of simple blood is won for you remission. By the simple means of

word, water, bread, and wine is given to you the forgiveness of your sins which Jesus won for you by His life, death, and resurrection. Jesus power to forgive you is hidden in simple, humble means—thanks be to God!

Because, here's the other thing about Jesus coming in glory. He will do that at His second Advent. Then, when He comes in glory, as He promised, the saving is over and the Day of Judgment is come. So, He delays until then, just as was mentioned last week, waiting and giving the Church on earth time, as She looks forward to, anticipates, and is prepared for that great and dreadful day.

Jesus has given to the Church His Word on His return. The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised, and He will come in the clouds. (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:52; Matthew 26:64; 1 Thessalonians 4:17) Until then, "Behold, your King comes to you lowly," humble, hidden in simple means. In these simple means, Jesus comes to you with great power, visible only to the eye of faith, to overthrow the devil, the world, and your own sinful flesh, and forgive you for all of your sins.

In the name of the + Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.