

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

The prophet Zechariah declared, "Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey." And so it is, that as He makes His way to Golgotha and the cross, Jesus enters Jerusalem looking like anything but a king. He is atop a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Is that any way for a king to make an entrance? Perhaps it is for a king in the line of David. As David neared death, his eldest living son, Adonijah, decided to declare himself king. But David was reminded of his promise to name Solomon his successor. So the elderly king declared, Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. Take with you the servants of your lord, and have Solomon my son ride on my own mule, and take him down to Gihon. There let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel; and blow the horn, and say, "Long live King Solomon!" Then you shall come up after him, and he shall come and sit on my throne, and he shall be king in my place. For I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and Judah. (1 Kings 1:32-35)

The priest and prophet did as the king commanded. Solomon rode to his coronation on a donkey—a mule, the translation says. These words are repeated two more times in 1 Kings, underscoring the importance of the event, not only of Solomon's coronation, but also, as some speculate, Solomon's ride upon a donkey. Though there is no other textual evidence of the practice, they assume that all of the kings in David's line rode to their coronations upon a donkey or mule, as if to connect themselves and their reigns with David and Solomon beyond their blood succession.

With that in mind, it sheds some additional light on Jesus' ride into Jerusalem, where He will be enthroned upon a cross and receive his coronation of thorns. The King comes, riding upon a donkey, a colt, a foal of a donkey. It looks just like Solomon when He was anointed king. It looks like every other king in the line of David, as some suppose, as they, too, ascended to the throne. And so, the people cry out, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!" They acknowledge Jesus to be the Son of David!

If Davidic kings rode to their coronations upon donkeys, then the people lining the road into Jerusalem likely recognized what was going on. King Jesus, of the lineage of David, is riding into Jerusalem to assume the throne. Here is the rightful heir to the throne, and the Davidic line of kings is going to assume the reign of Israel. Finally, as the prophets predicted, the kingdom of Israel—God's kingdom—is going to be restored.

But there is something more going on, too. In the ancient world, when kings rode off to war, they rode a horse—a warhorse it was called. However, when a king came to a place in peace, he rode a donkey. This was pretty common throughout the Middle East at the time, not just a practice of Israelite kings.

For Zechariah, he describes the coming of the King as one who is coming with justice and having salvation. There, God speaks through the prophet and says, "I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim And the horse from Jerusalem; The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.'" (cf. Zechariah 9:9-10) The instruments of war will be done away with, and the King will speak peace.

Once again, see Jesus enter Jerusalem on a donkey. Here comes the King in peace, and He will bring peace to God's people. The people shout, "Hosanna!" Hosanna roughly equates to "Save us now."

As those lining the road into Jerusalem laid their cloaks and palm branches on the ground before King Jesus shouting their hosannas, they were proclaiming the King to be the promised Messiah and Savior—the bringer of peace.

He was going to bring peace; what they understood that peace to be is debatable. Some were looking for a political figure who would restore the kingdom and expel all occupying forces—this is a political peace which wouldn't last—which couldn't last. Others who had some understanding of what Moses and the prophets were saying were looking for the Messiah to be something more than a political figure, but as the one to whom John once pointed and called the Lamb of God. (cf. John 1:29) This Messiah would be the fulfillment of all of those sacrificial lambs whose blood covered their ancestors for generations. This Messiah would be the one who would make peace between man and God once and for all by the shedding of His blood for the sins of the world.

This King, the Messiah, Jesus, will ride his little donkey in peace into Jerusalem. There, He would be betrayed into the hands of the chief priests and elders, handed over to the Roman authorities, handed over to the puppet king of Israel, and handed back over to the Roman authorities. Under pressure, the Romans would nail Him to a cross—standard capital punishment among the Romans for non-citizen criminals. Upon the cross, Jesus suffers the full wrath of God's judgment for the sins of the world; there Jesus suffers excruciatingly, in ways you cannot comprehend, as the holy justice of God against your sin finds its target: not you!

For you, because of Jesus the Messiah and Davidic King, there is peace. As the people shouted their Hosannas, they cried out to God not only for themselves, but for you. Jesus has come to save, and He has done precisely that as He suffered under the crushing weight of God's justice for sin and wrath for you. And if that is the case, and it is exactly the case, then there is no wrath left for you. All that God has for you is peace.

We do not sing it today as it will make it's glorious return to the liturgy on the evening of December 24, but this is exactly what the angels declared to the shepherds that night outside of Bethlehem. "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" Jesus' coming meant peace and goodwill toward men from God because it meant wrath and torture for Himself. This song of the angels, the *Gloria in Excelsis*, is echoed by the Hosannas that are sung by the crowds outside of Jerusalem and even from your own lips. Jesus has come, and He has saved—He has saved you, and by His death you have peace and life with God.

Still, there is more going on as Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. As you heard in today's Gospel, "Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey." Yes, Jesus rides a donkey as Solomon did to his coronation. Yes, Jesus rides a donkey as a king coming in peace did in the ancient Middle East. But more importantly, Jesus rides a donkey in lowliness and humility.

His coming at first, in flesh and blood, was humble. How low it must be for He who is God to come as His creation. But that is exactly what He does, incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the virgin Mary. For this Jesus did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped, but humbled Himself, made Himself of no reputation, and took on the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. (cf. Philippians 2:6-7) Then, as if that wasn't low enough for God, He is born not in any ordinary place for a person, but in a stable. Even today, the question, "Were you born in a barn?" is asked in a pejorative sense, but that is exactly the place where God was born—in a barn—and placed in a feeding trough for His crib.

His going about the region of the Middle East was also done lowly and in humility. Even as He rides into Jerusalem toward His death, Jesus is low and humble. He did not come as some great conqueror of mankind. He is not a King who rules His people as a malicious despot. Jesus is come as a humble servant of mankind—a friend and brother to His own, as He is come in flesh and blood like

yours—and His reign is filled with mercy and grace, at the expense of His own life.

Jesus still comes to you humble, in service to you, with mercy and grace. His coming to you is humbly hidden in means. You receive Him in His Word, as He is the very Word of God. And as He comes to you in His Word, He gives you faith and exactly everything that His Word says: forgiveness, life, and salvation. You receive Him in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism as you were washed with water and the Word, and there you received the gift of the Holy Spirit and the adoption of sons—through this Sacrament, you are joined to Jesus as more than just a fellow man, but also to His death and resurrection and made an heir with Him of all that is His. And you receive Him in the Sacrament of Holy Communion where He gives to you of His own body and blood, humbly hidden in, with, and under a morsel of bread and a sip of wine.

Jesus is hidden for you in these means, veiled from your eyes, as it were, so that you do not gaze upon His glory and die. This is both merciful and gracious. First, in coming to you in His means, Jesus deals with you mercifully, not giving you the death that you deserve for your sins, and graciously, giving you the forgiveness, life, salvation, and faith in Him that you do not deserve because of your sins. In these means, Jesus removes your sins from you as far as east is from the west, and serves you with his life-giving grace. Second, in coming to you in His means, Jesus deals with you mercifully so that, as mentioned, you do not gaze upon His glory with your sinful eyes and die, but so that you would receive from His graciousness the forgiveness and life He deems to give you.

But, Jesus will come again, and His coming again will be in glory. He will not arrive that day on a donkey, but on the clouds of heaven and bringing with him four warhorses—a white horse with a crossbowman rider, a fiery red horse with a swordsman rider, a black horse carrying a rider with scales in his hand, and a pale horse on which rides Death (cf. Revelation 6:1-8)—conquest, war, famine, and death. On that day, the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible and we, as St. Paul put it, shall be changed. (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:52) Then, having been changed, all will be made to look upon the glory of the coming of the Son of God.

There will on that day be no chance for a change of heart. For now and in times past, Jesus has come in grace and mercy, in humility and service. On that day, Jesus will come as the conquering and glorious Judge and King. Those who have lived a life of faith, that is, trusting solely in this humble King for their forgiveness, life, and salvation, and having not wrested from Him their sins, will receive their reward from the King: the crown of life. “Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10b) Not so those who have lived rejecting the faith that the Father so freely gives for the sake of Jesus, who sought forgiveness, life, and salvation by their own works, by which they wrest from Jesus their sins—for these, there is the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels (cf. Matthew 25:41)

St. Paul bids you to find comfort in these words—that Jesus will return.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

On that Last Day, that Great and Dreadful Day, you will be caught up together in the air with the saints who have gone before you with the same sign of faith you bear on your brows and breasts, and there you will meet Jesus. The comfort in Jesus’ return is that He has come in great humility to serve you in mercy and grace once before and continues to do so now. In His coming to you, He prepares you for His coming again in glory, which preparation sounds like this: you are forgiven for all of your sins.

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