

“A HOPE-FILLED ENTRY: JESUS COMES TO SAVE”
Lk. 19:28-40; Jer.33:14-16; and 1 Thes. 3:9-13

My dear Friends in Christ,

My father-in-law (may his soul rest in peace) was a hard worker who spent many years as a postal supervisor at the post office in downtown East Moline. He never knew how to relax. When he'd take a vacation away from home he'd always cut it short. If he had a week off, we knew he'd spend a day or two at the intended destination and that was all the vacation he could take. In retirement, however, he began to learn to relax (but just a little)! He liked to plan day trips for his grandkids and sometimes we'd accompany them. I remember taking the Amtrak to Chicago, because he wanted the grandkids to see the great museums—the Natural History Museum and the Museum of Science and Industry. But still, he could never relax. While we wanted to look at the various displays, he made a beeline through the museum as quickly as possible. It's hard to believe, but what is an all-day affair for most, he could accomplish in about 15 minutes! And I'm not exaggerating by much! In very short order, he was ready to catch the train for home.

It seem absurd, doesn't it? Yet, this is exactly what many people do at Christmas.

The Advent and Christmas story serves as the gateway to the story of Jesus—the story of our salvation. It's not the final chapter, but rather just the captivating introduction. Unfortunately, many people halt their journey at this threshold, failing to delve deeper. It's within this deeper exploration that the true rewards and wonders of Jesus' story are unveiled.

We begin each church year on this First Sunday of Advent by journeying with Jesus into Jerusalem—far from his birth in Bethlehem. In just a few days, He will reach the peak of His mission—the cross. As we enter this sacred story once more, we are reminded of our ultimate destination and the glorious sight that awaits us.

This sight surpasses the allure of any museum exhibit. It is the sight of the Son of God sacrificing Himself for sinners like us, so that we might become children of God.

Today, we heard the story of Jesus entering Jerusalem. For this humble procession, He requires a donkey. As God of God Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Jesus could have commanded the donkey to appear. After all, He orchestrated the gathering of animals into Noah's ark, because all creation obeys His voice. There's only one exception: rebellious mankind. The creatures made in God's image, the very beings Jesus came to save and restore. We exchanged this divine image for what? Adam and Eve exchanged the image of God for a piece of fruit, Esau for a bowl of stew... and us? A fleeting pleasure? or something else? What do you prioritize over God's Word? For what do you sell your inheritance? And why? Is it truly worth it?

Jesus prioritized your salvation above all else. He relinquished everything for you. It's unimaginable that He would enter this world and then avoid suffering and death.

Rather than asserting divine authority, Jesus chose a path of humble service. He healed lepers, expelled demons, restored the sick, and even raised the dead. These acts weren't mere displays of power but a foreshadowing—a foretaste of His ultimate sacrifice on the cross. As He, himself proclaimed, "The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

He didn't merely come to be God in the world, because He already was! He came as the world's Savior. To fulfill this role, He became one of us, living a perfect human life. This was a testament to humanity's potential to heed God's voice—a potential we tragically squandered.

Before His triumphant entry into Jerusalem, He experienced the full spectrum of human life. He was born to a mother, cradled in a manger, nurtured and cared for. He learned and grew, ultimately facing the ultimate human experience: death. He died as one of us, bearing the weight of our sins and enduring God's wrath.

Just as Jesus instructed His disciples to procure a donkey, His Father had commissioned Him to redeem us. And He faithfully fulfilled this divine mission.

As Jesus rode into Jerusalem, He was met with the praises of those He came to save. A great crowd rejoiced, proclaiming, "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!" This foreshadowed the countless multitude of Revelation 7, who will rejoice on the Last Day when Jesus returns visibly to raise the dead and bring us home.

However, not all welcomed Him. Some, then and now, reject Jesus' story. They cry out, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!" Many today similarly rebuke the church, her teachings, and her truth. They desire Jesus no more than they did then. Just as they crucified Him, they would also silence the church.

Jesus could have called down legions of angels to defend Him, summoned fire from heaven as James and John once suggested, or even crushed the cross with a mere gesture. Yet, He chose a different path. Instead, He hung on the cross and quietly uttered the most powerful words ever spoken: "Father, forgive them." These words, spoken by a dying man, shattered the devil's power and reconciled us to God.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey was not merely a humble act. It was a symbolic declaration of victory. Unlike a warhorse, a donkey signifies peace and triumph. While the cross was yet to come, the victory was already assured. God's promises are unwavering, and they will always be fulfilled.

The words of Jeremiah in our Old Testament reading, fulfilled in Jesus, point to the righteous Branch sprung from David's line and the Lord our righteousness. Through His birth, death, and resurrection, Jesus has made us right with God. His victorious words from the cross, "Father, forgive them," continue to echo today, offering forgiveness to all who believe.

Just as Jesus instructed His disciples to fetch the donkey, so too did His Father commission Him to redeem you. He's baptized you, given you His Spirit, and nourished you with His Body and Blood. His righteousness and victory are yours to claim. The humble donkey, the water, the words, the bread, and the wine are all instruments of His grace. The quiet, powerful words spoken from the cross are echoed in the proclamation of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness amidst a world of noise and strife. We need not shout or be spectacular; simply speak God's Word in truth and love, and He will do the rest.

Jesus enters our lives, broken by sin, shattered by lies, and weary from the world's relentless assault. He brings forgiveness, healing, and hope. When He returns in glory, we will not be rejected but welcomed home with open arms.

As we anticipate the day of Christ's glorious return, we recognize His present reality and His entry into our lives. Like those who welcomed Him in Jerusalem, we joyfully proclaim, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" As we prepare to receive His Body and Blood, the very elements that accompanied Him on that triumphant entry, we join the crowd, welcoming Him into our hearts.

We pray, as Paul did, for hearts purified by the forgiveness we receive here. We also pray for a deepening love for one another and for all people. May each Advent season mark not only the beginning of a new church year but also the dawn of a new life, lived in the image of God.

Today, we embark on a new journey with Jesus, just as He embarked on His journey with us. This year, we'll witness wonders and experience the goodness of the Lord. It will be a year of abundant blessings, for where God's Word is, there is Jesus, and where Jesus is, there is life.

The Savior of the nations has come, is coming, and will come again. Let us join in the fervent prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus!" O come, come, Immanuel." May God with us come to the world, to us, and to each of us. In Jesus' name, Amen.