

"Advent's Purpose" Matthew 21:1-9 Advent 1 2021

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon every one of you this day.

Throughout the church year, we follow a standard set of readings for each Sunday. Some pastors don't use it and instead come up with unique reading lists, but I'm new to being a pastor and don't see that I have the skills to do that, nor do I see a reason to. The readings for each Sunday were picked back in the 7th and 8th centuries, and they are chosen for very specific reasons. I have huge respect for the care and attention they gave to selecting just the right readings for a given season of the church year. In particular, I love how our forefathers of the faith arranged the lectionary readings for the Advent season. They get right to the point! No beating around the bush. No distracting introductions.

Now, at first glance, this may seem a bit off. In fact, for some of you, it may seem completely wrong. After all, this Gospel lesson is the recounting of Jesus' Palm Sunday processional. That's one week before Easter! The committee in charge of the lectionary organization tried doing their work after happy hour! Palm Sunday?! Blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord?! Check your calendar! Get with the program!

Well...why did God send His only-begotten Son into this fallen and sinful world? Believe it or not, that's a very good Advent season question. Why did God make a promise and then keep His Old Testament Word and promise and send His Holy Son to be conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary; the very birth that angels sang about to the shepherds in the fields who were watching over their flocks by night? If your answer is anything but, "to die for our sins," then you've forgotten Jesus' mission of redemption and salvation.

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When you think about it, this is what the season of Advent is all about. Why did God send Jesus to be born? Why did Jesus give up all of heaven's glory and majesty to take on the flesh of Adam? Why did Jesus fulfil all the Law of God perfectly, including circumcision and baptism? Why did He willingly suffer all that persecution, abuse, bloodshed, misery, hatred, and scorn? Why? Because of us and our sin. He did all this and endured all this because we can't redeem ourselves from the sinful death sentence that justly hangs over all men born of Adam. We can't save ourselves from the deadliness of our sin. We're dead in our sin, completely incapable of redeeming ourselves. We can't pay for one single sin, let alone an eternity's worth of sin. Folks: You could spend multiple lifetimes (if possible) trying to "work off" even one single sin, and you would still come up woefully short, just as dead in your trespass as the moment you were first conceived.

This is why our heavenly Father sent His Son to live and die for us. He came to take our place and suffer our justly-deserved death sentence. He came to pay our wage of sin for us. We can't do it. And even if we could, we wouldn't. You may not want to admit that, but it's true. It's human nature. We quit and give up on things because we can't find a parking spot closer to the door, or the line is too long, or we might lose our spot at the restaurant if things take any longer. We throw our hands up in the air and walk away when there's a chance we might have to give up a little extra time or effort or money. Not Jesus. Not ever. He made a promise in the Garden of Eden to our first parents, and He saw it all the way, through to Calvary and an empty tomb three days later to today and into all eternity.

This is why I love the faithful wisdom of our forefathers, who appointed the first Gospel lesson for the season of Advent to be the account of Christ's faithful, humble, lowly donkey-riding, Hosanna-filled procession to His cross and our glory. "Hosanna," which means "save

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us now!" This is what it's all about! Christ came to die for our sins. Jesus came to this earth for the express reason of the cross. He came for our sin. He came because of our sin. He came to save us. The season of Advent serves as a special time to remind us of this fact; to remind us that we need saving from our sins, and God did just that in the work and person of Jesus Christ.

Now...did God work this deliverance—this gift of salvation—in ways that were easily recognizable and understandable? No. Born of a lowly estate to a couple of lowly nobodies who were essentially squatting in a stable? Raised in the sticks of Galilee, and not in the metropolitan capital of Jerusalem? Friends of uncouth fishermen and dirty prostitutes and lepers and tax collectors and all the other dregs of society? Almighty God—the King of all kings—processing to such a cosmically glorious thing as the salvation of all mankind, processing on the back of a donkey and welcomed into town by the societal dregs with palm leaves and cloaks in some sort of pathetic hobo parade? A cross?! This is as low as one can get in life! Even God Himself says in Deuteronomy that anyone hung on a tree in such a fashion is cursed by God. Cursed by God!

And that's the very thing that's happening here [the crucifix]; the very thing we so often miss. Jesus became our curse. The perfect Lamb of God humbled Himself to be cursed by God, all so that we accursed ones could be made into lambs and children of the King. And this same almighty King continues to work these miracles of deliverance and salvation in our very midst this very day. The King of kings comes to us, not because we're such good and deserving people, but because we are sinners. Sin still clings to us; it penetrates and permeates to the marrow. This merciful and loving King processes to us with the same unconditional and limitless love that led Him to the cross. He comes to us today, mightily and assuredly, and yet still humbly and lowly. He

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comes to us in, with, and under the lowly means of a pastor's voice, the Word of Scripture, the Word of Holy Absolution.

Folks, this is what Advent is all about! Jesus Christ came and died for us and our sins. He paid that wage in full, and it is finished, once and for all. We have every reason in the world to be repentant. Repentance isn't just a hashtag or a buzzword. It's a reality. It's a state of being. Do you need to repent? Did your sin send Jesus to the cross? Does Christ come to you today because of your sin? Do you still harbour darkness and ill-will in that hard little heart of yours? Do you rejoice in God's mercy and love, and yet turn a cold shoulder or icy stare or sharp tongue to a person you disagree with...a person who Jesus died for too? Repent! Repent and rejoice! Sing your loud hosannas, for the King comes to you today! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He; blessed is the King, who comes to us in the name of the Lord!

In His holy name...AMEN