

1st Sunday in Advent: December 2, 2018
“You Beast of Burden”

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our text this morning is the Gospel Lesson, Matthew 21, especially these words, “**Matthew 21:4-5.**”

Today we begin the season of Advent, and thus, we start a new year. This text today, set in the First Sunday of Advent, ties Jerusalem to Bethlehem. The Royal Office of Christ is beautifully taught here. The first Sunday in Advent is known by its Latin name: Ad Te Levavi; which means, “To you, I lift up.” As a king would ride by, people would shout for mercy and help. Common petitions were lifted up, “Kyrie, eleison. Lord, save us now.” We, of course lift up our petitions to the King of Kings, as we have kept these phrases, “Lord, have mercy,” and “hosanna.”

There have been many ideas about the Kings of kings. There are many expectations, even today, of who Jesus was supposed to be, and what He should be doing. There are talks of what Jesus should have done. Rather than lifting up petitions to the King, we lift up commands to Jesus on how to really rule and govern His church. We like to throw our expertise at Jesus, and counsel Him on what really should be going on. Many times, we try to become a public relations consultant for God, to paint a better picture than what the Scriptures give. But Jesus is exactly who He said He was and did exactly what He was supposed to do.

Zechariah 9:9 tells us precisely who this king is to be, if we have ears to hear. While we like to believe we are the ones on the road side shouting hosanna, there is another character here that better portrays us: a beast of burden. We tend to express the burdens more during this time, as Christmas planning and hectic busyness are in full swing. We try to build this façade that we have it all together. We try to build the perfect holiday, and the perfect children, and the perfect marriage.

Where do we get these picture perfect ideas, usually painted from the media, like Oprah, Ellen, and Hallmark, the world, and with a little help from Satan who acts like Bob Ross, “We will just put a little more of this over there. If you really want to have as much fun as the Smith’s, you need to do this. If you have to have as good as children as the Koepp’s, you need to do this.”

Like a good beast, we take on more and more burdens, all the while putting on the face that nothing is bearing us down. While each burden adds more weight, we smile and take it, “Bring it on. What’s one more? I’m fine. I will simply go into beastmode.”

Our text specially mentions the child of the beast of burden. Children are often drug along on our seemingly, never ending quest of showing the world we have everything put together better than the next guy. They learn by watching us to take on more burdens and more burdens, and what do they learn about lifting up? To whom do they lift up? What does it look like? They see your sins. They hear your sins. They see your actions filled with death. They hear your murderous words shouted in anger and frustration. As the burdens of preparation pile on, your children, your spouses, your neighbors, feel your frustration and see just how, “*the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.*”¹

There is something special about these animals of Zechariah and Matthew. They are untrained. Kings would normally ride on animals specially trained for the noise a pomp and circumstance parade would encounter. An animal that is not used to constant audio and visual stimuli of a parade, could be spooked; which would spell disaster for the king, the bystanders, and of course, the animal.

Here again, we see ourselves. With the constant noise of the world and the unrelenting fiery arrows of Satan, our sinful nature runs wild. Like an untrained animal, we get spooked: “What about death? What if my tree is not big enough? What if I use the wrong plates? What if I get the wrong present? What if my child makes a bad decision? What if my spouse doesn’t get me a card like my friend did? What if I get a bigger gift than I give to my spouse? What if the food is wrong? What if my child misses this game? What if someone sees me hurting? What if people in church see me not being perfect? What if pastor knows?”

So where do we go? We run to answer these questions based on what our friends will see, or what Dr. Phil says, or what I think feels good. If it were up to us, we would throw Jesus off our backs, and run wild and free following our own passions. Just like the horse Spirit, we would be broken by no man.

¹ James 1:20

Among all of the chaos and death, our humble King comes riding. He sits not upon a war-horse, but on an untrained beast of burden. For you and as an example, He was lifted up. The King of kings and Lord of lords, the Prince of peace, was born to die. The Son of God became flesh. He became one of His creation. He became one of you. He shared in your pain and misery. He lived in the chaos of sin. He lived among the temptation of keeping up with the Jones'. He had burden after burden laid upon Him, and He didn't do it with a smile. He lifted it up to His Heavenly Father. In the Garden, the baby who was born on a silent night, would pray in earnest and sweat drops of blood. The King who heard, "Hosanna," that is, "Save us Lord, we pray;" would pray, "Lord have mercy."

And the Lord did have mercy. Jesus was lifted up upon the tree for you. This King wore a crown of thorns, and was nailed to the cross for the world to behold. The King who rode a beast of burden, the child of a beast of burden, would bear the sins of the world, and die to give eternal life to you beasts of burden, and to your children. The King would not stay dead. He rose on the third day, and ascended into heaven and now sits on the right hand of God, where He judges the living and the dead.

The actions this King does to you and for you, you beasts of burden, cannot be extolled enough. He lifts you up. In the midst of chaos and death, ***"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."***² ***"Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."***³

Jesus not only lifts you up by lifting up your petitions to the Most High God, He clothes you. Through Holy Baptism, you are covered with His garments of salvation. Your chaos of sin, your darkness of death, is drowned in the chaotic waters and you are led by still waters. The waters of life, the true holy fountain of God's Word, never changes; even the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.

² Romans 8:31-34

³ Hebrews 7:25

Through His sent ones, God brings you to Himself. Then at the foot of the mountain, among all the turmoil and confusion, He guides you up to His Temple, His holy throne, and the place of eternal piece and rest. The procession is not about you, it is not about the servants sent by Him, it is about Him. Brothers and sisters, this is the very reason we worship the way we do, and we set up our sanctuary the way we do.

I may get in trouble with this, but hear me out. I think it helps to teach the reality in which we live. The baptismal font, in my opinion, should be placed in the back of the sanctuary, right when you walk in. Weekly, we have a processional, in which we adorn the Holy Office of Christ. The cross leads us in, the light of Christ leads us in, and the clothes worn by the Servant of the Word, bears witness to the One to is come to speak. The words are not my own, but are His. As we begin this procession, each one of us would walk by the baptismal font, a stark reminder of being clothed in His salvation. We approach this altar not by our own power, but we are led by the cross and driven by the Holy Spirit who is given in these garments of life.

This would change the service just a bit, but for the better. We would start with confession and absolution in the back, right by the baptismal font, then as we sang our hymn, the cross and light and Office would lead us right to the place where His Word is proclaimed and His body and blood are distributed.

You see, the beasts of burden in our text carried Him to His death. He sat upon them and guided them there, and His work as not changed. He died for you, and thus through His Holy Word, He guides each one of you to the foot of the cross. It is there where we sit. It is why we put a tree in our homes. A dead tree, cut off from the ground and placed in water. A tree that is still green with life, even in death. It is why we puts lights to remind us of the light of the world. It is why we put presents under the tree. It is a reminder of the death of the cross, the life that it gives, the gifts that it gives, and for simple, beasts of burden.

Let the world have its chaos and its elaborate schemes, we will keep the cross. ***“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’ Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through***

wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."⁴

He is the reason for the season, and all seasons. He takes your burden of death and gives you life, as He yokes you together with Himself. He takes what you would call heavy, and instead makes you heavy. The Old Testament word for holy is also the word for heavy. To be holy is to be set apart, heavy, immovable; and this is what Jesus does for you beasts. As you prepare to celebrate, celebrate that you have been prepared. Jesus is exactly who He said He is, and done exactly what He was supposed to do.

“From the manger newborn light
Shines in glory through the night.
Darkness there no more resides;
In this light faith now abides.”⁵ Amen.

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

⁵ Savior of the Nations, Come LSB 332: 7

**Prayer of the Church
First Sunday in Advent
2 December 2018**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs. Heavenly Father, to You we lift up our souls as we enter into another Church Year. Make us to know Your ways, lead us in Your truth and open our eyes of faith to see that Your Son, our King, comes to us humbly mounted upon His Holy Word and Sacraments here in the Jerusalem of His Holy Church, where He delivers unto us forgiveness, life and salvation. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious Father, bless all pastors in Christ, that they would never tire of preaching Jesus Christ as the Branch of David come to be our righteousness and salvation. Continue to fill Your vineyard with faithful servants, that all people would hear this Good News. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful Father, cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit, that we may put away selfishness and greed, seeking to love and serve others as You have loved and served us. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty Father, keep this nation under Your care and bless the leaders of our land, that we may be a people at peace among ourselves and a blessing to the other nations of the earth. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Loving Father, look with mercy upon all those who are sick or suffering from burdens of this life in any way [*especially* _____]. Ensure that they receive the care they need, and strengthen their faith, that they might hold fast to the sure and certain promises they have in Your Son. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, our times are in Your hands. Look with favor, we pray, on Your servants *Oliver, Jenna, Gabe, and Gavin* whom You have granted another year of earthly life. Grant that *they* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *their* trust in Your goodness all the days of *their* life; Lord in Your mercy; **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, bring us to the holy altar in repentance and faith, that we might sing hosannas to the One who comes in Your name to give us His body and blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of all our sins. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal Father, we give You thanks for receiving all those who have gone to their heavenly reward before us and now rest from their labors. Keep us with them in that same faith, that together with them, we may receive the promised inheritance of Your eternal Kingdom as fellow heirs with Your Son when He returns in glory on the Last Day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Into Your hands, O Lord, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in Your mercy, through faith in Christ Jesus. **Amen.**