

More Than a Prophet
Matthew 21:1-9

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Happy New Year! No, I have not completely lost my mind having been gone for a Sunday. You see, according to the way in which the Church calendar runs, today marks the beginning of a new year.

As is true of the secular new year, the beginning of the Church year is a time of reflecting on the past and looking forward to the future. For Christians, one event in the *past* overshadows all others, and one event in the future is the focal point of our attention more than any other. Both events are the coming of Christ. In the past, Christ came to take away the sin of the world - that first advent we celebrate at Christmas. The second Advent is still to come, for in the future, at the Last Day, Christ will return in judgement.

During Advent, it is the goal of the church to keep both of these events in vivid focus. Our text for this morning, Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, is a wonderful text to begin the church year to do just that. This text focuses us on Christ's two advents by looking at His last earthly advent into Jerusalem.

As Jesus meekly rode into Jerusalem astride the foal of a donkey, what did the people proclaim? They cried out, "*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*" They thought Christ was going to be king, the one God had promised, the one who was coming to save them. They were right! Yet, they were also very wrong, for they wanted Jesus to be king to rule them and end the occupation of their Roman conquerors. Instead, Jesus came as a king to save all people from the sinfulness which have conquered them.

We know this text as the Palm Sunday Gospel lesson. We know this text as Jesus' entry into Jerusalem to die upon the cross for our sins. So, a common question asked by people is, "Why do we have this text as the Gospel lesson for the first Sunday in Advent? Why do we have to think about Jesus' death when we want to think about Christmas, and Jesus birth?"

Just as the people of Jerusalem wanted something different than what Jesus came to accomplish and deliver, so do people today. Stores began to prepare for Christmas many weeks ago. Many Christians want to begin focusing on the happy things of a Babe born in Bethlehem. Thanksgiving is past, so many want to start singing Christmas songs. But, we certainly do not want to begin thinking about the facts of Jesus innocent suffering and death.

Dearly beloved of God, to think about Advent is to think about why Christ came that first time. He came to die for your sins. He came to die for our selfish preoccupation with only the happy things. We'd rather focus on His miraculous birth - from the Virgin's womb. We want to think about the shepherds who came to visit. We'd like to hear the marvelous story of wise men who traveled the length of the land to bring their gifts to the newborn Babe.

The people of Jerusalem were also preoccupied with the marvelous. On that day, they were

amazed at His deeds of which they had heard, the news that He had raised Lazarus from the dead had preceded His arrival. Yet, they were confused about who He was and His purpose. Listen to what they thought, *And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?"* So, the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee."

My friends, earlier we stated that we are here to focus on the two Advents of Christ. If Jesus were only a prophet, there wouldn't be much to focus upon. If He were only a prophet, He would have foretold the coming of the Messiah to save the people from their sins. If He were only a prophet, we might have had a reading from one of His writings instead of from the prophet Jeremiah this morning.

My friends, Jesus was a prophet. In fact, He was and still is, the Prophet par excellence, but He was so much more than a prophet - He was Prophet, Priest and King. He was a prophet proclaiming the Word of God, calling people to repentance and doing marvelous signs to show that He was indeed sent by God. He rode into Jerusalem as the Great High Priest, to sacrifice Himself as the one atoning sacrifice that would pay for the sins of all mankind for all time. He came to be crowned as King of kings, victorious over man's most dread enemies; sin, death, and the power of the devil.

Today, we focus upon the two advents of Christ; His first Advent upon earth to atone for sin and His second Advent when He will return as the King of Glory to take all His loyal subjects to reign with Him in His Kingdom. My friends, His first advent made it possible for you and me to look forward to His second advent.

Today, we must put Christ's first advent into vivid focus so that we might look forward to His second advent with joy and hope.

As we begin to wind our way to Christmas and the birth of our Lord, we want to remember why He came. He came because you and I are disobedient children. We know the will of God for our lives, and yet we fail to keep that will. In fact, we have failed miserably.

Do you know how I know that you have failed miserably? Because of Christ's first Advent and because of the promise of His second Advent.

How many of you sometimes dread the end of the world? There is a preoccupation with it in all society. There are people all over predicting the end of the world, many see the end approaching because man is upsetting the balance in the climate, and so the end is coming. Revelation, the last book of the Bible is one of the most often requested books of the Bible to study. Look at the TV programs movies out there. How many see depict global devastation of some sort – zombie apocalypse, an asteroid inflicted destruction, or maybe even global flooding from the melting of the ice caps. Of course, there are ordinary guys who arise to help avert this doom and save the world.

Why are books and movies about the end so popular? And why do they come up with ways for mankind to stop the end from coming? Because they are afraid.

Stories of near death experiences and books about what is beyond this life are also extremely

popular. Why? Because death is another way that the end of the world can come for an individual.

These are all popular topics because people want to be prepared for their own end and, if possible, do what they can to avert it. Yet the reason for the fear is simple, it is a fear of the unknown and a fear of the judgement of God. These fears often arise from a lack of understanding of Christ's first Advent on earth. My friends, these are not the fears of people out there in the world. They are even the fears of those who are Christians, maybe even you sometimes share that fear.

I said that I know you have failed to keep God's perfect will because of Christ's first Advent. Maybe you are wondering how that is? It is because Christ's first advent took place so that He could conquer those fears, for the root of all those fears is sinfulness. Christ's first advent was so that when He was fully grown as a man, and the fullness of time had come, He might humbly enter into Jerusalem, and give Himself as a sacrifice for sin - your sins and mine included. That is why Christ came!

My friends, Christ's first advent took all fear out of His second coming. In His first coming, Christ has opened the gates of heaven to all who believe on His holy name. When He returns, as He prophesied that He would, He will take those who believe on His name to be with Him where He is.

Today my friends, focus upon the two advents of Christ. He came once to defeat your enemies, to sacrifice Himself and purchase you from the grips of the things which have conquered you: sin, death and the power of the devil. Now that you are His, look forward to the day He will return and take you to be with Him.

Yet we still live here in the midst of our fears. But He has conquered those too. He speaks to you and says, "You are forgiven - there is nothing left to fear." In your fear He comes with the soothing balm of His precious body and blood in a meal He places before you to give you forgiveness and to strengthen your faith in Him as your Savior and the grace to serve Him with a God-pleasing life.

Yes, my dear friends in Christ, He came once, He comes to us still, and He will come again - as much more than a prophet. Amen.