

**Ad Te Levavi (1<sup>st</sup> Sunday in Advent): December 1, 2024**

**“Behold, Your King”**

Grace, Mercy, and Peace be unto you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

**“Behold, your king is coming to you.”**<sup>1</sup> His coming is not what many expect. Many dismissed His first coming. Many dismiss His coming even now. He doesn’t come in ways that are obvious. He doesn’t come in ways that we want. Advent reminds us of this. While we begin a season of preparation for the season of Christmas in the Church Year, the world walks alongside of us. It too is preparing for Christmas, but their focus is on a different place. They may search at times for the right things, but in all the wrong places.

The world wants peace and hope and joy. It knows the craziness that abounds. People of all ages, all races, creeds, and clans are not immune to the stresses of life. Division and strife, anger, frustration, sadness remain, even while singing of seasons being merry and bright.

Sadly, the world has its season of false hope, pretend joy, and over indulgence. In their quest for peace, their season is marked by plastic knick-knacks, shiny distractions, and artificial flavors. It has become largely driven by a pursuit of profit, while it dresses itself up in the sentiments of pseudo-myths like Rudolph and Frosty, and romanticized notions in the goodness of humanity like what can one expect when being Home Alone, getting kicked out of the North Pole, or that God works special miracles only on 34th Street.

While dismissing the reality of sin, the world seeks to find peace and hope in highly emotionalized, sentimental moments that are impossible to make without the billions of dollars and camera work of Hollywood. Instead of finding peace in Jesus, it is placed in things where moth and rust destroy, or in moments that are stolen quickly from the mind. It should be no surprise then that this is the season in which Americans are most likely to suffer deep despair, profound loneliness, and intense dissatisfaction.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 21:5

Behold our King is coming. What will we do when He comes? Do we cry, “Hosanna. Lord save us!” or “Crucify Him!”? I mean, what do we really need a God for anyway? Aren’t we stronger and smarter than those people of old? This is one of the marked philosophies of our current time. We don’t want to get old. We don’t know how to age with dignity. We trust that I am the only one who can do anything right, and I am the only one who knows anything about anything. Instead of teaching and passing things down to the next generations, I want to hold on for as long as I can. This too is seen by the world advertising hopes during this season. You don’t want to ever look old, or give signs of weakness. You are not to ever be in a position to receive, only to give. The American Dream of hope and peace is having and giving to others. It is not receiving. That’s weak.

Even if it’s hard to admit, we do know better. The world today has fooled itself into thinking that we are stronger than our ancestors. We think this because our lifespans are longer, which is due to advances in biology, food production, and sanitation. While these have advanced, the reality of sin has not. In other words, theology has not changed. Our minds, our psychology hasn’t changed, hasn’t advanced either. We might see things differently, but there really hasn’t been advancements.

Human life lasts longer, but it also suffers more—more mental illness, more pain, regret, and sorrow. We are far less stable, more delusional, less content, more unhappy, than any civilization that has come before us. The shopping and party season that is now upon us is a frantic effort to cover over the obvious. Things aren’t getting better. They are changing. We are not getting better. We are dying. We need a Savior.

This marks an importance to Advent. In contrast to the world’s season, Advent is a season of repentance and self-denial. It gives us time to make room for realistic contemplation. It gives us pause to live in real expectation. Our season does not engage in myths. It engages in history. But none of that history makes much sense or has any real meaning unless we know the promise that God will make Himself a Creature in order to be our Savior, to restore us back to Himself.

This history finds its culmination and meaning just outside of Jerusalem, first on the cross and then in the garden from which Jesus arose. This is the preciseness, the located-ness, the presence that give urgency to our Advent. Our season begins with Jesus, God made flesh, riding toward that cross, answering the cries of the Church, Hosanna, in His own Body, that we would be delivered from this body of death and all that separates us from Him. Behold, your King is coming.

The ever weakening mental and physical states of mankind have been exacerbated by two overarching realities. One is convenience. Convenience can be a gift, but it does come with cost. It can lead to unhealthy idleness and a struggle, a wrestling with a lack of patience. The second is digital media. This too can be a gift, but its overuse comes with a cost. It changes our cognitive abilities and can wreak havoc on our mental health. We can put measures into place to try to counteract them. We can develop new habits, and these are good; but we are still missing the main point. The real cause of our problem is that our King is coming. We aren't as strong as we want to be. We aren't ready for Him to come and see me like this. Our main problem is sin.

It goes all the way back to Eden. Sin and death have entered into the world, corrupting all facets of life. The necessary response to our current situation, to viruses and inflation and pain, to political upheaval and profiteering and broken families, to our own guilt, our own fall into sin and even to death itself is to cry, "Hosanna!" Our King is coming.

That cry was heard before we even made it. It was answered by the Son of God taking up flesh, our flesh to make Himself a sacrifice more than equal to our need. He rode into Jerusalem without complaint. He knew what awaited Him, but He did not flinch. He rode in obedience to His Father, to glorify His Father's Name. He rode out of love for you.

This is our hope. This is our joy. This is where our peace is found. This is how God loves the world. He gave His only Son. Jesus is lifted up from the earth, is forsaken by His Father, and finishes, once for all, what we started.

Our cry, Hosanna, is absolutely necessary. It is a rational response to our pain and our world and we must make it, but it is not our only response. There is room for growth, for the training of mind, body, and spirit.

If there wasn't, why would we bother with Christian education? If there wasn't, why would we have a season to prepare to celebrate Christmas? This doesn't mean that we can overcome death and mental illness with discipline or education. It is simply that we desire, even now in our last hours, to live as men being restored to the image of God by grace and giving Him the glory.

Behold, your King is coming. This is not a superstitious fantasy. It is the Word of God. We know that it is true. Peace has come and rests among those with whom He is pleased, His own children. God's mercy does endure forever. Our King has come to us. He has answered for our sins. He was crucified, died, and was buried. He is risen from the dead.

Behold. He comes even now. Not in the ways that we would like. Not with military might or glittery packages with bows. It might not be a package tied up with strings, but these are our favorite things, because through His own word, in water, in absolution, in bread, in wine, He comes even now. Not simply to forgive our sins, but also to comfort us here, to strengthen our faith, to redeem the time, to guide us in His way. He is present in the Church, with His people, with us, in this congregation.

While the world prepares their search in vain, you know where true hope and peace are found. The days ahead may be hard, but it is coming to an end. You have a Savior. You are not alone. Behold, your king comes. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest! Amen.

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

**Prayer of the Church**  
**First Sunday in Advent (Ad Te Levavi)**  
**1 December 2024**

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

To You, O Lord, we lift up our souls and in You we put our trust. Do not let us be ashamed of our hope, but come quickly. Sustain us by Your Holy Spirit, that we may have joy at the advent of Christ, our Savior. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, by the ministry of Your Holy Church prepare the way for Your Son's return in glory. Send forth faithful pastors to proclaim Your Law and Gospel, and grant hearers ears to listen and hearts to receive their words in faith. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Gracious God, look favorably on our congregation and especially on our catechumens, that we may live sober lives, casting off the deeds of darkness as we wait for the revealing of our Savior from heaven. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord of love, visit our homes and defend us. Clothe us with the armor of light. Preserve the single in holiness, and lead husbands and wives to love one another and raise their children in the faith. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, our King, righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne, and steadfast love and faithfulness go before You. Watch over the authorities of our land, and grant that they govern justly so that we may live in peace as we proclaim Your love and faithfulness. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You have promised to send Your holy angels to guard and keep Your children. We thank and praise You for the gift of life and for the protection and care you have provided as *Jenna, Alivia, Gabe, and Gavin* celebrate their birthdays and *Kevin and Zach* celebrate their baptismal anniversaries. Grant that they may grow in grace, continue to know Your loving-kindness, abide in the confession of Your care and protection, serve You faithfully all the days of their life and finally come to the fullness of Your joys in heaven; Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O Lord, our God, uphold all who suffer and have asked for our prayers, *especially Dick, Ken, Ann, William, Zoey, Jeri, Pastor Small, Debbie, and those we name in our hearts.* Give them the knowledge of Christ, their Immanuel, who is with them in their trials. Grant them health and healing in accord with Your perfect will. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, Your Son humbly rode into Jerusalem to the shouts of "Hosanna!" so that He might give us righteousness and salvation by His death and resurrection. Mercifully grant that we would repent of our sins and rejoice in His presence as He visits us with His body and blood in His Holy Supper this day. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy God, You declared that the days were coming when You would accomplish our salvation, and in Your time You caused Your Son, the righteous Branch, to spring up for David. By Your grace, keep us joined as branches to Christ, that we might bear fruit until the day He returns in glory; for He lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**