

"Six Divine Songs of Emmanuel"

"The Sanctus"

Mark 11:1-10

December 1, 2002

1 Advent B

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Boise, Idaho

Pastor Tim Pauls

I. The King of Manger, Donkey and Cross

In some ways, this scene makes sense. In other ways, not at all.

The troops move toward the city, as armies often do. The vanguard goes out in front while the rearguard trails behind. In the middle of the throng is the King, protected by the crowd, mounted and riding. The attention is on Him; and as the progress continues, a hymn of praise erupts—a hymn for the King who is going into the city to conquer.

It's a scene repeated throughout the history of the ancient world. But in other ways, this one doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

This army advances in disarray, with no clear organization: There are no soldiers who are marching lockstep with purposeful eyes forward. There is no body armor to be found; in fact, they are removing robes and cloaks to be stepped on. These troops are not waving swords or spears in the air, but leafy palms that couldn't swat a spider. The King isn't riding a horse of war, but a colt—the foal of a donkey. And then there is the hymn of praise:

"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"

It's not exactly the most militant ballad that ever inspired the troops to go off to war and fight for the King. It sounds as if the King is going to do all the work.

It's a strange march; and it's going to get stranger still before the week is out.

The King will enter the city, and within the week He will be lifted up in the position ordained for Him by God—His throne will be two rough, intersecting wooden beams; and His crown will be of thorns. Before His bloody coronation, He will be beaten with His reed scepter and stripped of His royal robe. When His troops try to defend Him, He forbids them from lifting a sword. And as He is raised up on that cross to draw all men to Himself, there will be no hymn of praise. The crowd will offer curses and scorn instead.

To all appearances, this is hardly a successful campaign. This is not your normal army, and this is not your normal king.

But then again, this being Advent, we reflect that the King's birth is not exactly normal either. The King who would be man is born to a peasant maiden from backwoods Nazareth, not a queen. His royal crib is an animal trough. In Jerusalem? No, in Bethlehem, which rivals Nazareth in size and comfort. Instead of adoring crowds of subjects waiting outside palace walls for news, the only ones who come to see Him are scruffy shepherds, low on sleep and personal hygiene.

The night would be a wash as far as celebrations go, except that angels sing. They sing to the shepherds because this Baby is the King-and He is more than the King: Mother Mary holds her Creator in her arms. God has become man in order to save us from sin. In order to save...that's why He is named "Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Jesus. Savior. Save now. Hosanna. The song that the crowds sing as Jesus enters Jerusalem fits His entry at Bethlehem, too: "Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD."

"Hosanna"- "Save now!" Jesus, whose name means "Yahweh saves," will not grow up to be the Savior. He is conceived and born the Savior. He is the Savior as He causes John the Baptist to leap before either of them are born. He is the Savior as He draws His first breath of drafty stable air. He will continue to save as He first sheds blood for you on the eighth day of His life. At His birth, He is "Hosanna-ing"-He is saving now.

"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!" Blessed is He who comes in the name of Yahweh! The angels sing the same substance that night: This is not just a prophet, a representative of the Lord. This is Jesus, "Yahweh saves." "Our Redeemer from Everlasting" is incarnate to save.

His birth and His Passion go together, and we sing of both with the whole company of heaven. At birth and Passion, contrary to appearances, He is there saving. But let us not pass by another profound, fundamental truth: At birth and Passion, he is there. The Son of God is flesh and blood! Mary holds His body in the stable as His heart pumps blood to oxygenate all of His vital organs. That same body, full grown, rides the donkey into Jerusalem; that same blood will flow at the cross for our salvation.

He comes to save. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.

II. The Sanctus: Song of Heaven and Earth

Dear Christian friends, your life is one that runs contrary to appearances. Do you appear to have God's favor? A survey of your days and nights may well argue to the contrary. Would a righteous child of God be hassled at work or troubled by arguments with family? Would one who shares Christ's victory over death still suffer from sickness, weakness, injury and death? Would one who is forgiven for all of his sins still contend with-and often lose to-temptation, sin and failure? No. By all appearances, being a Christian doesn't seem to be much of a help to you.

At least, that is what the devil would have you believe. But you do not rely on appearances; you rely on the Word of God. And so you remember the King who lays in a manger, rides a donkey into Jerusalem, and suffers death on the cross.

You do not remember Him for a sympathetic boost-the purpose of all of this is not to lead you to say, "Jesus had it worse than I do, so I shouldn't feel sorry for myself." It may be true enough, but it

is not the point. In part, you remember the King of manger, donkey and cross so that you might always be reminded that the Lord's victory and power will often appear unremarkable, even shameful, in this world. There is comfort in this for you, in the form of assurance: Though your life may seem unremarkable, inglorious, even shameful, it does not mean that the Lord is far away.

But there is a greater reason to remember the King of manger, donkey and cross. At each of those, He is present-the Son of God incarnate is at work to save with His body and blood, though the world cannot see or comprehend. And here is your further hope and joy: The Lord is just as present, with you, here-to save.

The hosannas of Palm Sunday are not heard just once a year in the Church; they are part of one of the five great songs of the liturgy, the Sanctus:

Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth:
Heaven and earth art full of Thy glory!
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is He! Blessed is He!
Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest!

Half of this great hymn you have heard already tonight, because it is the song of praise on Palm Sunday: The people shout out this praise because Jesus is there, in their midst, body and blood, to save them.

The first half of this hymn is not first sung on earth, but in heaven: Around the throne of God, seraphim continually sing, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth: Heaven and earth art full of Thy glory!" (Is 6:3). They sing this because they are in the presence of Yahweh Himself. They sing it only to the Lord almighty.

Put the two halves together, and you have this song of heaven and earth-the throne of heaven and the Triumphal Entry. You sing it here, week after week: A song that Jesus is the holy Lord God of Sabaoth, a song that Jesus comes to save you now.

You sing this just before the Holy Communion, as Christians have for ages. You sing this because the almighty Son of God-second person of the Trinity-is holy, and He is here. Contrary to appearances, He lay in a manger in Bethlehem, body and blood wrapped in swaddling clothes. Contrary to appearances, He won your salvation as His body was nailed to a cross and His blood was shed.

Contrary to all appearances, the Son of God-the second person of the Holy Trinity-gives you His body and blood. Why? For the forgiveness of sins. The Son of God gives you His body and blood to "Hosanna" you, to save you now.

You can't see it: Eyes only see a baby in a manger, a corpse on a cross, some bread and wine. You can't see it, but you have His Word on it; and by faith, you know who He is and that He is here-to save now.

Therefore, by faith, you know that-despite appearances-you are indeed a holy, chosen child of God,

blessed with His favor and help for now and eternity. For now, you face trouble and suffering, but the Lord uses that to your good. Hassles at work and arguments with family are the result of sin, yes; but they are far from proof that God does not love you. If He did not love you, He would not visit you to save you now. No, these troubles are continuing evidences of sin, that you might always be reminded of the precious gift of your Lord's visitation to you. Sickness, weakness, injury and death will still afflict you; the devil will try to convince you that God is angry, but this is not the case. Were God angry with you, He would not visit you to save. No, let sickness and weakness constantly remind you not to trust in your own health and fitness for salvation; and let the promises of God assure you that He who conquered death will use your death for your good-to deliver you to life everlasting. You will still suffer temptation and failure, and you will still sin. It is no excuse, and such sin can lead to unbelief and condemnation; but your failures do not mean that God has failed you. If God has forsaken you, He would not visit you to save; but He does come, and His words declare that you are not forsaken: "This is My body - this is My blood, given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins." He has not just died for others: He has died "for you." He does not leave you in your sinfulness-He comes to you with the forgiveness of sins.

You may be troubled, but you are not forsaken. He who comes in the name of the Lord comes to you. And He comes to you to save now.

That is why you sing this song of praise-the song of the crowds on Palm Sunday, when Jesus came to save. That same Jesus-fully the second person of the Holy Trinity-comes to you. He comes to you with His body and blood. He comes to you to save now.

Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! In the name of the Lord, you are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen