

Advent 1 / December 3, 2023

Mark 11:10

“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David.”

Our gospel lesson with which we begin the season of Advent, is a gospel that begins Holy Week; Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and His reception as king. Advent is the season before Christmas, but more than that Advent is a season in which we remember the purpose for which Jesus was born into the world; the salvation of the human soul. Advent is a season to remember and anticipate His coming at the end of the age; the fulfillment of salvation, the resurrection of the dead and the creation of a new heavens and a new earth, in which God reigns in all and through all. In our text last week St. Paul said, “Then comes the end when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father.” Advent is a season to anticipate the second coming of Jesus as our God and Saviour; and the eternal kingdom He will establish when He makes us, all believers and all things new!

At the time of Jesus' first Advent, Israel was anticipating the restoration of the kingdom of their ancestor King David. Jesus lived a thousand years after King David. In the intervening centuries Israel experienced a civil war that led to a division of kingdoms, the north called Israel and the south called Judah. In time the northern kingdom was invaded, defeated and dispersed throughout the Assyrian Empire. Only Judah remained, but five centuries before the time of Christ, it too was invaded, defeated and dispersed throughout the Babylonian Empire. What had happened to the promise the Lord had made to David of a descendant to sit on His throne forever and a kingdom that would have no end? Things were so bad it seemed that not even the Lord could make it better.

Is anything too hard for the Lord? The angel said to Mary “nothing is impossible for God.” In the midst of Judah's exile, the Lord gave a glimmer of hope. The Babylonian king released the king of Judah from prison and gave him a place at his table for the rest of his life. Within seventy years the Persian Empire replaced the Babylonians. The Persian king set the captive peoples free. The remnant of Israel and the descendants of David returned to the land of Judah, rebuilt Jerusalem and the temple. Nothing is too hard for the Lord. Nothing can prevent the word that goes forth from His mouth from achieving His purpose: The restoration of David's kingdom in time. The establishing of His eternal kingdom through Jesus our Saviour. The prophet Isaiah sang, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” Jesse was the father of David. God was the Father of Jesus and through Him the line of David was restored.

A thousand years after David and five centuries after the return of Israel from exile, Jesus was born to Mary in the city of David. He had David as His ancestor in time and God as His Father from eternity. He reinvigorated the fallen line of David, so that the stump of Jesse was renewed. He fulfilled the promise of an everlasting kingdom in a way no one but the prophets anticipated. He brings a kingdom of grace to the hearts of all over whom He reigns as king through faith. He reigns by the blood of His cross, through which He forgives our sins. He makes us a kingdom to His God and Father through forgiveness received through faith in His Name.

The people of Israel at the time of Jesus were expecting a great earthly kingdom. But God had something greater in mind. The kingdom Jesus established extends to the farthest reaches of the earth, embraces people from every nation, tribe and language and will endure forever. Jesus' kingdom is the righteous reign of God in the hearts of those who believe. It enters our hearts through faith in the forgiveness of sins. It reaches throughout the earth through the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus as Saviour. God reigns in righteousness over the hearts of those who believe and receive baptism into Christ's death and resurrection. His reign begins with the seed of the word, which germinates in faith in Christ as Saviour. Faith grows as the Holy Spirit extends His reign in the hearts of those who believe. The kingdom will come in its fullness in the resurrection of believers, when Jesus returns on the clouds in the glory of the heavenly Father.

The people of Israel, including Jesus' followers, were expecting a political kingdom, ruled by a king, wise like Solomon powerful like David. Jesus was both wiser than Solomon and more powerful than David. When Jesus proceeded from the Mount of Olives and made His way towards Jerusalem, He was announcing Himself as the descendant of David and heir of his kingdom. He was fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah, who centuries earlier had foretold the return of the king saying, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey...His rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the river to the ends of the earth.”

The people believed. They cried “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest!” They had faith, but they didn’t fully appreciate the kind of kingdom Jesus brings. He brings a kingdom of grace and peace with God into the hearts of those who receive Him through faith in the word and the washing of holy baptism. He brings a kingdom of eternal life, which will come in its fulness when He makes His second advent on the clouds with the angels in the glory of His heavenly Father. Then with the faithful of all ages, we will sing, “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest!”

What kind of kingdom does Jesus bring? Jesus’ kingdom is the righteous reign of God in the lives of believers, through the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. Jesus’ kingdom is a kingdom of the Spirit, by which believers are set free from the bondage of sin, the control of the devil and the condemnation of eternal death. His kingdom comes through the knowledge of salvation in the forgiveness of sins. His kingdom brings light to those who sit in the darkness and shadow of death. As our king, He leads us in the way of peace. The kingdom comes now through the word and working of the Holy Spirit. The kingdom will come fully when He returns. On that day He will call us to rise in newness of life, body and soul and give us eternal life in the presence of His heavenly Father.

Jesus brings the kingdom now in our gatherings as believers. Jesus brings the kingdom through the washing of His blood in the forgiveness of our sins. The kingdom of God is the heart of each believer baptized into the Divine Name; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The kingdom of God is the assembly of believers, where Jesus is present when as few as two or three are gathered in His name. The kingdom of God is the full number of believers from every time and place. It will come fully when Christ returns and calls His own to rise to share fully in His resurrection to eternal life.

What the kingdom will look like at that time no one can tell, but it will be more than we could possibly imagine. St. Paul said, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard what God has prepared for those who love Him.” We wait in faith with patience inspired by the Holy Spirit, knowing that as Jesus came first at Bethlehem, established His kingdom on the cross outside Jerusalem and has reigned in the hearts of believers from His resurrection to today, so His kingdom will come in its fullness. He will return on the clouds, in the presence of the holy angels in the glory of the heavenly Father.

Advent is a season to prepare for the coming of the King in the fulness of His glory. Our faith is encouraged by the reminders of His first coming and by the ways He continues to come into our lives. His kingdom comes through the encouragement of His word. His kingdom comes through the fellowship of believers. His kingdom comes by His Holy Spirit in the forgiveness of our baptism. His kingdom comes through the nourishment of His Holy Supper. Jesus entered Jerusalem humbly in fulfillment of a prophecy of Zechariah to sacrifice His life for the forgiveness of our sin. Jesus came in humble fashion. He continues to come in humble ways. But Jesus will return in power to make our salvation complete in the resurrection to life everlasting.

Jesus entered Jerusalem in fulfillment of a prophecy of Zechariah. He will come again in fulfillment of another prophecy of Zechariah. Looking to that day in chapter fourteen Zechariah writes, “On that day His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley... Then the Lord my God will come, and all the holy ones with Him.” God in His mercy preserve us to that day, when with all who have ever believed, we welcome our Saviour and King singing, “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David. Hosanna in the highest!” In Jesus’ Name. Amen.