

Advent 1
Matthew 21:1-11
O Lord, How Shall I Meet You?
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“O Lord, how shall I meet You, How welcome You aright?” What a good question! How can we welcome the Lord Almighty? The crowds in Jerusalem from our Gospel lesson give us a wonderful example. They took off their cloaks and cut down branches from trees and laid them on the road for his donkey to walk on. They shouted out, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” There were shouts of joy and singing, a happier event than you’ve seen at any street parade.

Yet, how does this teach us how to meet our Lord? Should we cut branches off trees and stand out in the street waiting for Jesus to come in? No. The example these saints in Jerusalem give us is the example of *faith*. They received Jesus as their King and Savior through faith. And their laying down cloaks and palm branches, their shouts of joy and praise, these all revealed the faith within their hearts.

The crowds wouldn’t let the donkey Jesus road on touch the ground, so greatly they revered their Lord. They called him, “The Son of David,” which means that they believed him to be the Christ, the Righteous Branch, which God promised to raise up from David (Jeremiah 23:5-8). These crowds confessed with their words and actions that they believed Jesus to be the fulfillment of the prophecies of Scripture. They heard from his teaching and saw from his mighty deeds that he was indeed the promised Christ. Jesus taught God’s Word with authority and was faithful to the Scriptures. He made the blind see and the deaf hear; he made the lame man leap like a deer, as Scripture foretold. (Isaiah 35:5-6) They believed that Jesus was the Christ who was coming into the world. (John 11:27)

And these saints crowding the streets of Jerusalem used the words of Scripture to sing praises to their Lord and King. They shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” These are the words of Psalm 118:25-26. Hosanna means, “Save us.” They are treating Jesus as their Savior and as saints are wont to do, they use the very words of Scripture to praise him.

And, so we should follow in the train of these saints who welcomed Jesus' advent into Jerusalem that week of his crucifixion. We should have faith in Jesus. We should call him the Christ, the King in the highest, David's Son and Lord. We should call him our Savior and cry to him for salvation with great anticipation. We should listen to the prophecies of Scripture and their promises and believe them. And we should borrow the words of Scripture as we worship our King, who comes to us, just as these saints did. And that is indeed what we do! Every Divine Service before Christ Jesus comes to us in his body and blood at the Sacrament of the Altar, we sing these same words, "Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna, Hosanna, Hosanna in the Highest!" These are words of faith, which have been used by the saints for thousands of years.

And we should be joyful. We have a Savior who loves us. We should gladly come to worship him. This should be our fervent desire, not an obligation that takes up time we don't have. Worshiping Christ, welcoming him into our midst is the greatest thing we do in life, the most important, and the most rewarding.

St. Paul also gives us instruction on how to meet our Lord, not only on Sunday mornings, but every day, especially as the day draws near for his return. He writes, "Salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires." (Romans 13:12-14)

And so, we too should recognize that our Lord Jesus came to die for our sins. He came to rescue us from their destruction and filth. If we are to welcome our Lord in faith, we must also repent of our filth, cast off the works of darkness which seek to enslave us and cling to Christ Jesus, walking according to his teachings of love, purity, honesty, and self-control. Scripture warns that the sexually immoral, the drunkards, the sensual, and those who are jealous, will not inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21) In Revelation 21, after describing the wonderful vision of the new heaven and the new earth, and Jesus, the Alpha and the Omega wiping the last tear from our eyes and destroying death, St. John writes, "But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually

immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” (vs. 8)

And so, it is clear that Christians cannot go on sinning as if it does not matter without repenting. You cannot rightly welcome your Lord Jesus if you refuse to turn from your sin. This means that if you have a habit of getting drunk, stop it. If you are fornicating, stop it. If you pick fights with people, gossip, lust after impure things, stop it. And every time these sins arise in you again, cast them off again. Drown your old Adam every day, so that the new man may rise up to welcome Christ at his coming.

It is sin which makes us fearful of Jesus’ return. If Christ comes to judge the nations, a terror to his foes, then it is a terror to those with a guilty conscience! Well, how can you greet Jesus with joy, when you’re a sinner? Jesus hates sin. Scripture clearly states that the wicked will be destroyed and sinners will not stand in the judgment (Psalms 1:5-6; 37:38)!

You can greet Jesus with joy, because Jesus does not come to deal with you according to your sins, but to rescue those who wait for him (Hebrews 9:28), that is, those who have *faith* in Christ’s forgiveness and salvation. Yes, Christians must repent of their sins. If you refuse to repent and continue to live as if sin is not a problem, then you are not a Christian. Your faith is fake. Yet, even Christians with a sincere faith still sin. We can’t help it. We’re still trapped in these sinful bodies. And although we desire to do what is right, our sinful flesh still lures us into sin each day. Although we daily drown the old Adam in us, he rises again to agitate our conscience. This is why St. Paul laments, “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.” (Romans 7:29) This is the condition of all Christians. Yet, there is a big difference between falling into sins of weakness but repenting of them, and continuing in sin with no remorse without turning to Christ for forgiveness. Jesus promises to forgive you as often as you repent. But if you refuse to repent, then you refuse Christ’s forgiveness.

This is what the Apostle John says in 1 John 1, “If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.” Christians are still sinners on earth. And Christians are saved. Jesus saves sinners. That is what he came to earth to do. The crowd in Jerusalem, which welcomed Jesus with such faithful songs and praise, were welcoming him

who would die for their sins. That is why Jesus came to Jerusalem. He came to die for the sins of the whole world.

This means that your sins should not make you doubt your salvation. Jesus died for your sins. God knew your sins and the sin of the whole world, and he still sent Jesus to pay for it all with his suffering and death. In Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we see how willing Christ is to die for us. We see how set he is on winning for us salvation. Jesus commanded that his Church baptize all nations. Scripture promises that Baptism forgives sins and grants salvation to all who believe. Jesus told his ministers to forgive the sins of others and promised that he also would forgive their sins in heaven. Jesus sent out his Apostles to preach the Gospel in every land and promised that whoever believes and is baptized will be saved. The bread and wine, which we share in the Sacrament, Jesus tells us is his very body, which he gave for us on the cross, and his very blood which is poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus came to earth to save sinners. And he comes to us today in his Word and Sacraments in order to save us.

As Christians, our sins do not cause us to fear Christ's arrival, because Jesus died to take away our sins. And he comes to us frequently through his Word and Sacrament in order to heal us and forgive our sins, so we do not fear his coming on the Last Day, because we know how he will deal with us. As we just sang,

Sin's debt, that fearful burden,
Cannot His love erase;
Your guilt the Lord will pardon
And cover by His grace.
He comes, for you procuring
The peace of sin forgiv'n.
His children thus securing
Eternal life in heav'n. (Paul Gerhardt, *O Lord, How Shall I Meet You*, LSB 334:6).

As the crowds and children received Jesus in faith and joyful praise, Jesus' enemies in hatred plotted his destruction. Less than a week later, while this crowd of Christians slept after celebrating the Passover, Jesus' enemies arrested Jesus, put him on trial, hurling fists and false accusations against him, and brought him before the pagan governor. By the time the faithful woke up, Jesus was already headed to the cross. In confusion many of them ran and hid, many lost heart. Jesus' own disciples hid in fear

behind locked doors. Only when Jesus returned victorious from the grave and sent the Holy Spirit to them, did these faithful gain courage again to sing his praises in public.

And so, it is with us today. As the chief priests and scribes looked with hatred upon the celebrating faithful in Jerusalem, so the powerful in this world hate and plot against the Church. Satan and his real human minions look at our celebration of Christ as foolish childhood play. They seek to discourage us and to erase Jesus from our hearts and from this land. But just as Jesus overcame the evil plots of Satan and the chief priests, so Christ has arranged for his Christians to overcome the plots of the enemies of his Church. Though we face evil in this world, we will prevail. While the enemies of Christ look at Christ's return with terror and the more foolish among them look at it with scorn, we look to Christ's return with joy and great anticipation, for we know that when he comes, he will give an imperishable crown of righteousness to all who love his appearing.

He comes to judge the nations,
A terror to His foes,
A light of consolation
And blessed hope to those
Who love the Lord's appearing.
O glorious Sun, now come,
Send forth Your beams so cheering,
And guide us safely home. Amen. (LSB 334:7).