

**Ad Te Levavi, the First Sunday in Advent, A ✠ D 2009**  
**Matthew 21:1-9**

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

1 You can't have Christmas without Advent. The world wants to jump headfirst from Thanksgiving into Christmas. Talk of a penitential season, a season for fasting, a season not for wishing a Merry Christmas or even Happy Holidays but Blessed Advent, is foreign to the world. But Advent is just that: a time for almsgiving, for fasting, for prayer, for preparation, for watchfulness, for repentance. Feasting without fasting is empty. Joy without repentance is superficial. Christmas without Advent is a hollow holiday. Before white is blue. Before the celebration of the Incarnation is the season of preparation. Before the Lord's return to rule in glory is His rule through the Church's humility.

2 There are two ways of doing things: one is the way of kings, the way of stallions and war horses, the way of power and authority; the other is the way of paupers, the way of donkeys, the way of humility and suffering. There is a time for both: both Advent and Christ's Second Advent, both humility and glory, both a donkey and a stallion. There is a stallion way of doing things and a donkey way of doing things.

3 Advent begins with this collect: stir up Your power, o Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance. If your sins weren't threatening perils, you wouldn't need Advent. For that matter, if your mind were constantly aware of the threatening perils of your sins, you wouldn't need Advent.

4 Advent is the reminder and the warning. Your flesh is not correct. "Salvation is nearer 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 quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires."

5 Left to your own devices, you will not realize the threatening perils of your sins. Your flesh is not your friend. What he wants is not good for you. His only morality is "if it feels good, do it." If it feels good to sleep in an extra hour and miss Bible Class or an extra two hours and miss the Divine Service, as well, do it. If it feels good to disregard your parents and other authorities, those who prescribe curfews as well as speed limits, as long as you can get away with it, do it. If it feels good to harbor anger and resentment, giving you something to bring up and hold against your neighbor or coworker whenever you need some leverage, do it. If it feels good to feign marriage, occupying the same bed, while scorning the blessing of God or the state, do it. If it feels good to fudge the numbers a little bit, if it pads your paycheck and makes holiday shopping a bit easier, do it. If it feels good to look with scorn at the poor, assuming

their poverty is their problem and their fault, do it. If it feels good to amass goods and toys at the same rate as unbelievers, do it. So says your flesh.

6 But that's not the Advent way of things, the donkey way of doing things. Advent calls you to something beyond now, beyond your fleshly desires. Advent calls you to different desires, to desire not instant gratification but gratification delayed, to desire not the temporary pleasures but the eternal, to desire not what the world glorifies but what the Lord glorifies. Why a season to warn about the threatening perils of sin? Why a season for hearing about the Lord's hatred of sin? Because sin is perilous. Your Lord doesn't hate sin because He's a prude but because He's your creator and knows better than you do what's best for you.

7 The Lord's way of doing things is a donkey way of doing things. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. He came lowly and humble to endure shame rather than receive glory. God donned human flesh, was born of a virgin mother, placed in a manger. It's a donkey way of doing things. Humanity was mired in sin, enslaved to sin, deserving nothing but eternal death. The stallion way of doing things would have been to scrap the whole lot of humanity—let them go to hell if that's what they preferred—and start over. But the donkey way of doing things was to get into the mire, not to call humanity to something higher, but to descend to humanity's depths. The donkey way of doing things was to ride into Jerusalem, not to conquer, but to be conquered, to give His life in the place of every human life, to destroy death by dying, to deliver humanity from sin by dying condemned. To save you from your flesh, He took human flesh. To save you from the world, He entered the world. To save you from the devil, He defeated the devil in His death and resurrection. It's a donkey way of doing things.

8 "‘Tell this to the daughter of Zion,’ the prophet says. ‘Open your mouth and shout so she is not offended by His lowly coming but listens to what is proclaimed.’ Let your ears give insight to your eyes. Your King has no great stallion, no spurs, no saddle. He is poor and rides a donkey. And yet there's no king like Him. He removes your sin, rescues you from death and hell, and gives you everlasting holiness and righteousness, eternal life and blessedness. So don't pay any heed to the wretched way in which He comes and then later also shamefully dies on the cross. For He does all this for your sake as Savior to help you, to sanctify you and rescue you from death.'" (Luther)

9 For now, the Lord's way of doing things is the donkey way of doing things, riding in humility, with power and glory hidden in the cross. There will be a stallion way of doing things later, at the Day of His Return, His power will be unveiled, His glory will be unhidden, fully revealed. The King who rode on a donkey will return as One riding on a white stallion, to establish His eternal kingdom visibly. Then, those things seen will disappear, and those things unseen will become the only things seen. That's the point of Advent, to turn your attention from the things seen, the things temporary, to the things unseen, the things eternal.

10 The donkey way of doing things is power hidden in humility, the extraordinary cloaked in the ordinary, the Savior upon a donkey. The donkey way of doing things is to deliver salvation in ordinary water. The donkey way of doing things is to send a man to do God's work,

to speak sins forgiven. The donkey way of doing things is to cloak the true Body and Blood of Jesus in simple bread and wine. The donkey way of doing things is to redeem sinners, to take their sin away, to give them a righteousness from outside themselves. The donkey way of doing things is to package forgiveness in simple, seemingly foolish means—word, water, bread and wine—and deliver it to people least deserving. Advent seems foolish, like a donkey way of doing things in a stallion world, but it's the Lord's way of doing things. Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion, your King comes to you humble and riding on a donkey.

*In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

Pastor Jeff Hemmer  
Hope, Jerseyville