

Advent I

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Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. On Palm Sunday, the people of the city of Jerusalem shouted, Hosanna to the Son of David.

Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. But they might as well have been singing, O come, O come, Emmanuel, since the meaning behind the two are so very, very similar.

After all, that word, Hosanna, is a rather curious word that can be taken both as a cry for mercy, as well as a song of praise.

In other words, Hosanna can mean, Lord, please, please save us now. Have mercy and rescue us today. Or, Hosanna can mean, praise God and rejoice, for salvation has finally come.

And when you think of it, isn't that pretty much what the words of that famous Advent hymn, O come, O come, Emmanuel, tell us as well? For the first verse of that hymn reads, O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns, that mourns, laments, and lonely exile here.

[1 : 28] But the second verse, the second half of that same verse reads, Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel. And that's really pretty much the season of Advent in a nutshell.

A rather confused kind of season that really can't make up its mind whether it's supposed to be celebratory or whether it's supposed to be penitential.

And maybe that's why the gospel reading for the first Sunday of Advent is pretty much the same as the beginning of Holy Week, because the themes for both are so very, very similar.

For like Palm Sunday, Advent is a time of joyful expectation and great hope. So we rejoice. But, like Lent, Advent is also a time to repent and to prepare, a time to pray and to fast and to give alms. Spiritual exercises, which we are all called to do, just not quite as rigorously as we would during Lent. Which, again, is why, suppose, the gospel reading for this morning is about how our Lord came riding into the city of Jerusalem on a donkey amid loud shouts of Hosanna.

[2 : 53] For what was the very first thing that our Lord did immediately after he entered the holy city? He cleansed the temple. He purified God's abode.

And he made his Father's house of prayer an actual house of prayer once again, which is exactly what we all must do now if we ever hope to meet our God aright.

Therefore, as we enter this season of Advent amid loud shouts of Hosanna and amid somber songs of O come, O come, Emmanuel, let us cleanse our hearts, our minds, and our bodies, that which by virtue of our baptism into Christ the Holy Spirit has declared to be his holy temple.

Let us cleanse our temples, not fashioned with human hands, and let us prepare ourselves for the coming of our King.

For our King really is coming. And he is coming to us not just on Christmas. And he is coming to us not just today in the Holy Eucharist, but most especially, he is coming to us on the last day, on the day of judgment, on that day when Christ Jesus will return to judge both the quick and the dead.

[4 : 23] For the real reason for this season, this season of Advent, is simply to prepare for the Lord's coming.

So before we raise our glass of holiday cheer, let us first remember to pick up our prayer book and prepare. For today, a new church year begins.

And perhaps this year, this will be the year when our Lord returns. Or perhaps not. But either way, thank God for Advent, a season that's sole purpose is simply to prepare us for the coming of our Lord.

Therefore, as we prayed in this morning's collect, and we'll pray again and again every day in Advent, up until Christmas, as we prayed this morning.

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness and put upon us the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life, that on the last day, when Christ Jesus shall come in his glorious majesty to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal. [5 : 47] For that is really what Advent is all about. A time to prepare, a time to repent, and a time to rejoice, as we draw closer and closer to the coming of our Lord.

So today we hear Hosanna to the Son of David. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And today we sing, O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel. For the coming of our God and our King is near at hand. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.