

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, a lot of stirring is going on. The stirring of cake batter and cookie dough. The stirring of excitement as children wait for their stockings to be filled and presents to appear under the tree. All of this stirring is the sign of good things to come.

But in our text, we see a different kind of stirring. We're told that when Jesus entered Jerusalem, *"the whole city was stirred up."* Not with excitement and anticipation. Just the opposite. The Greek word for stirred up here means agitation. Their posture toward Jesus is not welcoming so much as annoying. His coming makes them tense, restless.

*"Who is this?"* they ask. Who is this riding into the city on a donkey? Who is this causing such a disturbance? Who is this who makes people lay down their cloaks before him as they shout *"Hosanna!"* "Oh, this is Jesus!" the crowds reply. *"The prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."*

We see two kinds of people here, don't we? Those who welcome Jesus, and those who do not. Those who change their schedules in order to come out and receive Jesus into their city, and those who are unwilling to change their lives for Jesus.

It's the same today. There are those who receive Jesus, who alter their busy schedules to make room for Him. And there are those who are unwilling to accommodate Jesus for whatever reason.

This is Advent, and Advent means coming. Jesus is coming, just as He comes to the people in our text. As Christians, we tend to be bothered by people who take Christ out of Christmas. Christmas is Christ! we remind them. And indeed, it is. But even as we hammer this point home, we may forget that every Sunday morning is Christ.

We get all worked up over those who ignore Jesus in the manger. But do we ever ignore Jesus in the baptismal font and in the Sacrament on the altar? Do we so look forward to the words of the angel: *"This shall be a sign for you, you shall find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger,"* that we look right past Jesus' own words to us from the pulpit? If we're so focused on Christmas, the danger is that we lose sight of Advent.

Advent is a time of preparation. A time to repent. It's why God sent John the Baptist before He sent Jesus. John called the people to repent before the Christ came on Christmas.

But like the world, we tend to skip over Advent. And this can be fatal. The world can be seen in the people of Jerusalem. They do not welcome Jesus because they are not repentant. No sorrow over their sins. Who needs a Savior when you're not much of a sinner?

But the crowds going before and after Jesus on the road are crying *"Hosanna!"* Save us! Help us! is what this means.

That must be our Advent cry. We cannot save ourselves. Our sins are too heavy for us to carry. We need a Savior. We need Jesus. Hosanna! Help us, Jesus! Save us!

But the Jesus who saves is not lying in a manger. He is hanging from a cross. And that cross is preached here from the pulpit. That cross is in your baptism and proclaimed in the Holy Sacrament.

It's as we ponder the cross of our Lord that we recognize why we need Advent. "We proclaim Jesus' death on the cross," says Luther, "so we may learn to be horrified by our sins and to regard them as very serious." A baby in a manger does not horrify us. And so, we need to be horrified now in Advent. Otherwise, we will not cry Hosanna! with the crowd. We will not see ourselves as wretched sinners who need a bloody Savior on a cross.

Are these words stirring you up? If not, that's too bad. Jesus came into Jerusalem precisely to stir it up. And that stirring up is what we need now in Advent.

Yet keep in mind that Jesus comes riding on a donkey. It's a beast of burden, not a war horse. He does not come to fight against us because we have sinned against Him. He comes gently. He comes in humility. He comes being carried by a donkey because He will carry His cross up to Golgotha. He carried your sins there, all of them.

"Who is this?" asked the people of Jerusalem. This is the Son of David, the Promised Messiah. This is your Lord. This is your God who counts you of more value than even His own life. For you He suffers and dies. For you, for each and every one of you Jesus rides on the donkey in order to hang from Calvary's cross.

God forgives you for Jesus' sake. All your wretched sins He forgives. This is what His cross means for you. God, your God, is at peace with you. He is not angry at you. He sent Jesus to the cross to be punished in your place.

Hosanna! the crowds cry. Hosanna! we cry. Save us! He does, my friend. Jesus comes to you today, right here in His words of pardon and peace. He comes to you. He comes to save you. Amen.