

**Zechariah 9:9b; Mark 11:1-10**

Today is the official beginning of Advent. But from a worldly point of view, Advent began two days ago. Advent, which means “coming,” was all store owners and sales clerks thought about as they filled their shops with wares and opened their doors at six, five, or even four o’clock in the morning. Hordes of shoppers were coming. Wallets and purses filled with cash and credit cards were coming. After months of seeing their books in the red, the coming of Black Friday meant, for many, that their financial records would now shift into the black.

Onlookers from another planet might come to the conclusion that the days before Christmas for us are about buying and selling, decorating and baking, filling stockings, wrapping presents, rushing off with the kids to see Santa Claus, and falling each and every night into bed exhausted. And this is something we do annually...and we look forward to it.

We have made Christmas so complicated, when really it is so very simple. The prophet Zechariah and the Evangelist Mark tell us today that Christmas is nothing more, and nothing less than the coming of the Savior. “Behold! Your King is coming to you!” “Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” You may have taken part in the madness of Black Friday two days ago, but today in the stillness of Sunday morning the true meaning of Advent is proclaimed. These words of Scripture give meaning to your shopping, and baking, and decorating. And although we clutter up the month of December with so much stuff, and running and rushing, these words of our Lord keep our focus on what is really important. Everything that we buy today will perish, but the Word of our Lord will stand forever. Everything we bake, build, and decorate will rot, decay, and come to an end, but God’s Word will remain. Even the donkey upon which Jesus sat as He rode into Jerusalem has long since turned into dust, but He who sat on it is here with you today.

When Advent begins, hope seems to come alive; spirits are rejuvenated; Christmas joy fills the air, even of those who seldom offer a smile. Yet, do you recall where these words of our text come from? This Advent procession took place during Lent. Jesus wasn’t riding on a donkey like Santa Claus riding in a parade. He was riding toward the cross. Jesus wasn’t dreaming of a white Christmas as He rode into Jerusalem. His thoughts were filled with the coming wrath of God; with the suffering and agony He would soon endure; with His leaving, His departure from this world.

And even as we hang our tinsel and wrap our stocking stuffers, His thoughts may become our thoughts. Instead of “coming,” Advent for us is more like “leaving.” Gone are the solid economic times. We’re heading into a recession, many predict. Our dollar is weak. With every financial statement we see that more and more of the money we have invested is leaving us. We may walk into stores anticipating good deals, but we leave with bigger debts to pay.

We can watch the enchanting film, “It’s A Wonderful Life,” but such a world has come and gone, or it never was here to begin with. Instead we hear of hundreds dead in India where gunmen massacred innocent people. We hear of a security guard in New York trampled to death by shoppers rushing into their local Wal-Mart. We hear of a shooting at a Toys-R-Us in California where shots rang out and two were killed. The “merry” part of Christmas, instead of coming to us, seems to be leaving, and leaving in a hurry.

And for many of us, each Christmas we are reminded that the good health we once enjoyed, is also leaving. Our sight, our hearing, even our walking and stretching—as we get older, many of the activities we used to take for granted we can no longer do.

Instead of “coming,” Advent seems for us to be more like “leaving.” We remember with joy past Christmases where family members would gather around the Christmas tree; and now many of those loved ones have left us. In their place there are only photographs and memories. For some the sadness is so intense that they wonder, we wonder if God, also, has left. Where is His joy? Where is His Christmas peace? Instead of coming, it may seem to us that even God is leaving.

But friends, we do not live by sight; we live by every Word that comes from the mouth of God. And His word to you today is, “Behold! Your King is coming to you!” This is the future tense in the present. Jesus who came, and who will come again, is now today coming to you. Times are tough. Your money concerns are very real. But do not be afraid. God has not, and will not abandon you. He will provide for all of your needs. He comes to you through those who help. He comes in ways you do not expect. God is not on recess. There is no recession with Him. “He freely gives you all things.” He does not leave you to endure hardship alone; He is with you now to meet your every need.

Though your health may be leaving you, God will remain your Refuge and Strength. Though this world’s troubles frighten you, in the Lord you have shelter and peace. And though loved ones have left you, in Christ they are still with you. They are gone only from sight. In Jesus we are one with them, united in His body. And in heaven we will, with our eyes, see them again; and with our arms hold them again.

This is Advent. This is the time of our Lord’s coming. He is with you in this House just as the person sitting next to you is with you. Jesus will come again, but today He comes to you now. His flesh and blood is real, and here today at His altar He gives Himself to you and for you. Through the very words you are hearing, Jesus comes into your heart to give you His peace. He died for you. He lives for you. He felt the wrath of God in your place. God is at peace with each one of you. This word of forgiveness is in your ears, and it is the truth. Although you and I have lived as though Jesus was not coming again; although we have lived for ourselves; lived selfishly; the word of forgiveness is God’s word to you—you are forgiven. Do not fear. The punishment which should be coming to us came to Jesus on the cross. And He comes to you now with nothing in His hands except the marks of the nails. He comes not in anger, but in mercy.

This is Advent. It is the time of the Lord’s coming. And so even though we will be leaving this world in death; even though we will be leaving our families behind, we have real comfort. We will not leave forever. Because Christ came to a cross for you; because He came to baptize you in His blood; because He comes now with forgiveness and eternal life in His word of grace, our leaving in death will give way to the coming of a blessed reunion in heaven.

This is Advent. Where is God’s joy? Where is His Christmas peace? Look no further than the word of the cross. Look no further than this Holy Sacrament. Jesus who came, and who will come is, for you now real joy. He is your peace. And so go shop, bake, decorate,

visit Santa, father with family; enjoy this month of December because you have a Savior who is for you, and comes to be with you. Amen.