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A NEEDY KING BORROWS A BURRO
Matthew 21:1-11; Advent 1A; November 29-30, 2025

Jesus was a bit of an embarrassment as a king. Typical kings come with displays of power and wealth. When the time came for Jesus' grand entrance into the royal city Jerusalem, He looked inept and unprepared. He had no chariot to ride, or a stallion. He had no royal robes or crown, nor the money to rent them. Jesus had to send a couple disciples ahead to beg for a borrowed ride, a little burro.

Americans don't have kings, but we do have presidents. When US presidents travel by air, they fly on Air Force One, a 747 jumbo jet. An advance team flies ahead with armored limousines and multiple support vehicles. The entourage is immense. The parade of vehicles causes traffic jams. This projection of power and prestige while protecting the president costs a fortune.

Compare that to Jesus' coronation parade as King. **“Now when they drew near to Jerusalem... Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, ‘Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, “The Lord needs them,” and he will send them at once.”**

When it came time for Jesus to make His grand entrance, His disciples did their best to provide some pomp fit for a king. They sat Jesus on the diminutive burro colt – a full-grown man on a little donkey does not inspire a sense of majesty – laid their cloaks on the road, cut palm branches to wave in celebration of victory, and sang the psalms of David proclaiming him and his Seed as the once and future King, the Messiah, the Christ. They got the attention of those in the city, both the residents and the out-of-town crowds there to celebrate the Passover. Matthew tells us that **“the whole city was stirred up, saying, ‘Who is this?’ And the crowds said, ‘This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.”**

What happened after the parade? When Jesus' royal entrance was over, they picked up their robes and led the borrowed burros back to their owner. Jesus melted into the crowds, a King indistinguishable from other humble, common men.

We are starting Advent, the beginning of the liturgical church year, with its traditional Gospel Reading of our King's entrance into the holy city Jerusalem to claim His throne, which came toward the end of Jesus' earthly ministry. We have not forgotten who Jesus is from last year: God's Son conceived in Mary, born in Bethlehem, etc.

We don't forget any of that about Jesus, but Advent is sort of a "reset" for us. The Church Year ended with the promise that Jesus will come in glory to reign as our King, having put all His enemies under His feet. Advent reminds us that we haven't reached that day yet. That day is definitely coming, and we are looking forward to it with great hope; the blue of the altar paraments is said to be the color of hope.

Advent is sort of a reality check for us. We are still in this fallen world, struggling with our sins in anticipation of our deaths. This world is falling apart and will pass away one day, so we know we can't trust in it for our future. The persecution of God's people is on the rise around the world. Even in America those of us who want to remain true Christians in faith and life are considered weird, impediments to progress, and even threatening to those who reject this faith. So when we speak up for what is right, some find it necessary to knock us down and marginalize us.

A recent extreme example of this is the assassination of Charlie Kirk. A popular Christian leader gathering a large following is dangerous to the establishment and must be silenced. His death will not be last of its kind.

Advent reminds us of this, especially its start with Jesus, a needy King borrowing a little burro for His royal entrance. Matthew tells us as much. **This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"** Jesus did not ride in grandly on a war horse, but humbly on a work animal. His was a victory parade, but the victory to establish His kingdom was yet to be won. Jesus' most important work was yet to be done. His coronation would include scourging, soldiers mocking Him as a fake king, being enthroned on a cross and wearing a crown of thorns. Others did not pay the immense cost of His coronation. His own blood did.

Jesus is a humble, suffering King for humble, suffering people. Jesus is a needy King who came for needy people. We hear that in the shouts and psalms sung by the people as Jesus rode in on that humble, little burro, though it is unlikely that they really understood how Jesus would fulfill what they were saying. **“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”**

Hosanna is from the Hebrew of Psalm 118 and means, **“save us now.”** How it was used then was less a plea for salvation than a cry of victory. The original psalm has, **“Save us, O LORD/Yahweh!”** It is a cry to the Lord God for help and salvation. The crowds cried out to Jesus as the **Son of David**, the Messiah, Christ the King who would come **in the name of the LORD** to save His people. The second **“hosanna in the highest”** was from Psalm 148, modified from the original **“Alleluia-Praise the LORD.”** The people were praising God, who had sent a Savior in Jesus. When Jesus rode in, even though it was humbly on a borrowed burro, the people hailed Him as their victorious King, even though He had not yet won the victory.

In the Communion liturgy of every Divine Service we sing this same song to Jesus. The *Sanctus*, the “Holy, Holy, Holy,” includes these words. **“Hosanna... Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord... Hosanna in the highest”** (Setting 3, *LSB* 195). Our song is different from the crowds in this way: we are on the other side of our humble King’s cross. Jesus, our King, has already been enthroned on a cross to the point of death, won the victory over sin, death, and the devil for us, risen and ascended to rule over all His enemies.

Our “hosannas” are sung in triumphant praise because Jesus has won the victory for us, but they are also lifted up as humble, dying sinners still in need of saving. We are still on this side of the cross in the sense that we still take up our crosses to follow Jesus through suffering and death before we can rise in victory. We are saved already by what Jesus has done for us, but we still need saving at the same time. Our sins continue; we still need forgiveness. Our bodies are still dying; we still need raising. The devil is still our old evil foe seeking to kill and devour us to take us from God before Satan is cast into the lake of fire forever. We have the victory in Christ, but our “hosanna” is still “Save us, now, Jesus!”

As we begin Advent again, we realize that we are still needy people. Our neediness is reflected in Jesus, our needy Savior, who sent ahead two disciples to borrow a burro to make His grand entrance. Jesus came humbly; He became as low as the lowest of us to lift us up to reign with Him in glory. We need God's salvation in Christ Jesus, and we look forward to it with hopefulness.

This makes Advent a good time to reflect on why Jesus needed to come: to save us. We need to confess that we are still poor miserable sinners who deserved temporal and eternal punishment but won't get what we deserved because of our Savior's "holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death" which forgive and save us. Therefore we can cry out, "Hosanna! Save us!" not only with hopefulness, but also with joy that our Savior has come already and will come again in glory to save us from this vale of tears to live with Him forever in heaven.

Today we were reminded that our needy King borrowed a burro and came humbly to save humble, needy sinners like us. **"Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!"** Amen.