

Grace and peace to you from Him who comes.

Look around this morning. Yesterday we were all on ladders, stringing lights, hanging garland along these walls, lifting that tall tree into place, and hanging those white-and-gold Chrismons one by one. We laughed, we dropped ornaments, we got poked by the sharp needles on the tree, and by lunch this room looked like a royal welcoming hall.

Now listen again to Matthew:

As they approached Jerusalem... Jesus sent two disciples, saying, "Go... you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me... The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. And the crowds... were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" (Matthew 21:1–9)

Do you see it? Yesterday church members here were the advance team for the very same King.

Those green garlands running along the walls? They are our palm branches, fresh-cut and laid down for Jesus to ride over. That Christmas tree standing tall in the corner? It is the living tree the crowd raided for branches to wave and to strew in the road. Every Chrismon we hung—crown, lamb, cross, star, descending dove—is a shout of "Hosanna!" spelled out in gold and white so even the walls themselves cry, "Blessed is He who comes!"

We think we are only decorating a building. In truth we are rolling out the royal carpet for the gentle King who is, right now, on His way here.

The Greek word that matters today is one Matthew slips in quietly: *praus*. When Zechariah said, “Behold, your king is coming to you... gentle (*praus*) and mounted on a donkey,” that word *praus* means power that has chosen to be tender. A *praus* soldier is the one who can split a shield with his sword yet sheathes it when a child runs into the street. A *praus* king is the one who could call down twelve legions of angels but instead lets children sit on His knee.

That is the King riding between our garlands this morning.

And the second word is *hosanna* itself. It is not just happy noise. It is a desperate prayer: “*Save us, we beg You!*” The crowd shouted it because Roman soldiers walked their streets and taxes crushed them and sickness and sin crushed them harder still. They needed rescue. We needed rescue. So yesterday, while we hung lights and laughed, the real reason the sanctuary looks like this is because we are a city that has heard the hoofbeats of the coming King and we are crying with one voice, “*Hosanna! Save us!*”

Feel the tension for a moment.

The people that first Palm Sunday wanted a war-king on a stallion. They got a peace-king on a colt. Five days later many of the same voices turned to “Crucify Him!” because the gentle King refused to be the violent king they demanded.

We are not so different. We decorate beautifully, we sing the loud hosannas, but sometimes we want Jesus to ride in like on a tank and fix everything on our terms—smash our enemies, balance our checkbook, make the test come back negative, force the family to behave. When He rides in gently instead—when He speaks forgiveness instead of thunder,

when He offers a cross-shaped love that costs us something—we are tempted to drop our palm branches and walk away disappointed.

But Advent will not let us stay disappointed.

Look again at what we did yesterday. We did not hang swords and spears on these walls. We hung beautifully lit green garlands that remind us of life in a cold world because of God's mercy. We did not crown the tree with a dagger. We crowned it with the star that led wise men to a Baby and with the crown of thorns that became a crown of life. Every Chrismon tells the same story: the King who rides in meekness today is the Lamb who was slain and who lives, and because He lives, every hosanna we shout will be answered.

Here is the joyful turn that makes the heart leap:

The King has accepted our decorations. He is riding right now between the garlands we strung, under the tree we lifted high, straight to this altar and straight to you. He still comes *praus*—gentle, lowly, borrowing whatever His people will give Him: a donkey then, bread and wine now, your own repentant heart today. And every “Hosanna!” that rises from these pews is heard, every branch we wave is seen, every light we hung is a prayer He delights to answer.

The same Jesus who once rode into Jerusalem to die rides into this sanctuary to give life. He traded the donkey for a cross so that one day He can trade the cross for the clouds and come once again, and next time our knees will bow in gladness, not by force.

So look once more at the garland, the tree, the Chrismons shining in the Christmas lights. They are not just pretty. They are prophecy. They are the welcome mat for the King who saves by being gentle, who conquers by forgiving, who rules by dying and rising again.

He is here. The branches are down. The cloaks are spread. The children are waving and the angels are listening.

Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes—gentle, mighty, yours forever.

Amen.

The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in Him.

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