

When the Lord Comes Near 1) He Humbles Himself

Luke 19:28-40 • 2021-11-28 • Advent Series "When the Lord Comes Near"



It seems that many people enjoyed the live-action remake of the Disney film Aladdin. In one of the more memorable scenes the main character is parading into the city. He is actually a beggar and thief, but he is presenting himself as a wealthy and famous prince. There is a musical fanfare as he marches in with ornate dancers all around. The chorus describes how wonderful and amazing he is. Ostriches and other exciting animals' parade alongside the dancers. Then you see the prince himself riding upon an elephant. He's proudly smiling in his white flowing robes -hoping everyone will buy his act and join the excitement of the parade. And the music and the impressive display certainly pulls the viewer into all the fanfare. The so-called prince was doing everything he could to make himself look grand as he marched into the city. But not everyone was on board with the excitement. The princess he had come to see was not so impressed. And apparently neither were many of the movie critics who reviewed the film. I guess no entrance parade will be able to please or impress everyone.

What about God's entrance parade? Does his coming impress everyone? Today we'll be starting a series for the season of Advent. We'll be looking at what happens when the Lord comes near. We'll begin by considering what kind of an entrance parade he makes. And it's not the type of parade or fanfare you might expect to see at the coming of the greatest man who ever lived. When the Lord comes near, 1) he humbles himself.

The entrance parade recorded in Luke 19 is a big deal. It's not just a turning point for a movie. Nor is it something just down for show to impress people. It is the pivotal point in the life of Jesus. And it is recorded by all four gospel writers. By this point Jesus' ministry had carried on for three years. The crowds around him kept growing as news of his teaching and miracles spread. But he had more than his critics. He had gained powerful enemies. And Jerusalem had become the center of opposition to Jesus. There the group called the Sanhedrin had been plotting on how to have Jesus killed. His disciples knew it. Many of his followers were aware of the conflict and the dangers. Some were even wondering if Jesus planned to ever head to Jerusalem for the coming Passover. If he did, it meant there would have to be some sort of showdown. This trip into Jerusalem was a crucial turning point. By entering into the city Jesus was indicating he did not fear his enemies and would not back down from his teaching or his role. It called for a grand entrance, one fitting for a king coming near to his people.

Jesus orchestrated his entrance parade. Luke appears to emphasize for us how everything Jesus does for his entrance parade shows he had a plan. And he planned out his entrance the way only someone like Jesus could. He sent two of his disciples ahead to get things ready. They were told to go to the nearby village which was just about an hour's march from Jerusalem. He gave them detailed instructions for the parade staging. Imagine the surprise the disciples might have had when he tells them where to find a colt for the parade. Jesus already knows there is one available. He knows it is one which has never been sat upon, and he knows that the owners will be willing to loan it out to him.

Some speculate that Jesus might have simply previously made some arrangements by speaking to the owners. But that's not the Jesus or the Luke I know. Firstly, Luke doesn't record information without a purpose in mind. Luke isn't interested in demonstrating to us that Jesus was good at planning ahead and organizing his entrance parades. Rather, Luke is speaking about the Jesus we know. He wants us to see the side of Jesus which demonstrates he is no ordinary man. Jesus is the one who knows the thoughts and hearts of people. Jesus knows the colt, its owners, and knows what will happen. He has perfect knowledge of the future. He is not just a man. He is the true Son of God making his plans.

But wait, this is his plan?! The Son of God is going to make his grand entrance into his city by riding on a young, borrowed donkey? When the Disney movie makers didn't have the ability to provide a real tiger or real ostriches, or a real trained acting monkey for the movie, they used computer generated images. And their images were so convincing that it left some people asking if the tiger was real or not. I still can't figure out if they used a real elephant for the parade. Maybe they did. But they are one of the richest movie companies in the world. So, they have the ability to computer generate any animal they want for any movie scene. What about the Son of God? Couldn't he have marched into Jerusalem with a real elephant for each disciple and with himself riding atop a roaring Tyrannosaurus? He could have at least strode on the lord of the horses with a triumphant stride. Or he could have pulled a cue from his birth celebration and called upon the host of angels to appear in glory to shout praise at his coming.

But his plan wasn't going to impress his enemies with a display of glory. He was going to amaze his disciples with a display of his lowliness. And as he marched towards the city gate the crowds ran out to greet him. They showed honor by throwing garments and palm branches in his path. They shouted in honor saying, *"Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"*

That is our King! When he comes near us, he humbles himself. At his birth the angels cried out something very similar. But now near his death his followers shout the praises. They proclaimed him to be the promised King from David's line who would take his father's throne and rule over all the nations. They proclaimed him to be the greatest one who ever lived.

But he had in fact come in such great loneliness to be the greatest who ever died. Jesus had it all planned out. Everything from the entrance parade to the time when he would have the crown (of thorns) placed on his head. He planned for the reception of the soldiers who would say "Hail, king," and then beat him. It was all part of the plan.

Not long beforehand Jesus *took the Twelve aside and said to them, "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. Indeed, he will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, mistreat him, spit on him, flog him, and kill him. On the third day, he will rise again."* They did not understand any of these things. What he said was hidden from them, and they did not understand what was said. (Lk 18:31–34). But we now understand. When the Lord comes near, he humbles himself. That's what he did when he first came near. He humbled himself to suffer and die in the place of the people. He lowered himself to die for our sins. That's how far your God will humble himself as he comes near to you.

The Lord still humbles himself as he comes near to us today. That's how the God of grace approaches sinners. Do you recall the time when Elijah the prophet fled in fear? After the Lord gave him renewed strength he ran to sleep in a cave. It was there that the Lord said he would come near and reveal his presence to the prophet. There came a rushing wind and a crashing and crushing of rocks. But the Lord wasn't in the wind. There came a great earthquake that no doubt drove Elijah to fall down in fear. But the Lord wasn't in the earthquake. That was followed by a great fire. God had appeared in fire in the past. But he also comes in other ways. He didn't appear to Elijah in the fire. Finally, after all the grand powerful events had finished Elijah heard a soft, gentle whisper. The prophet wrapped his face in his cloak and went out to the entrance of the cave. The Lord spoke to him then.

That's how the Lord comes to his people who are fearful and waiting in hope for his coming today. He isn't found in the glamour of expensive movie films. He isn't found on the world stage getting all the attention of the news. He comes in his Word to the fearful mother who has a sick child. In a soft voice he comes with his gospel to say, "Don't cry. Don't be afraid. Everyone who has been baptized has been clothed with Christ." He comes to the lonely woman in mourning at the loss of her husband. The simple Word comes to her that says, "I am the resurrection and the life...whoever believes in me will live, even though he dies." Just earlier this week I heard a story about a man who knows his wife doesn't have long to live. Her last breath will likely be coming soon. But the Lord comes to them with his gospel to bring comfort "Your king has come. Your sin and death have no power over you." And he comes to you today with his message, "I have come that you might have life! I have come to give my life as a ransom for yours!"

When he came in lowliness the crowd had to praise him. They praised their King who would lower himself in order to be with his people. They praised him with the faith that he had come to fulfill God's promises. You and I join in praising him for his humble coming. We praise him for his presence in the sacrament as we partake of the bread and wine with his own body and blood. It's not a grand display of power as he comes near to us. But it is a coming which brings us life and joy so that we praise him each time he comes near in the sacrament, "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."

But just as that movie had its critics, the greatest entrance of all time also has its critics. Some of the Pharisees who saw Jesus' entrance parade didn't like it. They saw how he had come in such lowliness. They heard the praises of the crowds. They knew he was accepting their praise of him as the Messiah long prophesied. They didn't like it. "*Teacher! Rebuke your disciples.*" They wanted Jesus to tell everyone that he wasn't the Messiah. They wanted all the parade goers to see how lowly and pitiful this parade would be if it was really the Messiah coming to them. They didn't understand the truth long foretold in Scripture: when the Lord comes near, he humbles himself.

Still today you'll have people that will put down the praises of Christ because of his lowly coming. They will say "How can anyone actually welcome Jesus in such lowly form today?" But his disciples will praise him still, knowing he comes near to us in the sacrament. And you'll hear the enemies of God dismissing the singing of Christmas carols and Christmas songs on the radio. They will say that we've moved on to bigger and better ideas like the holiday spirit and the spirit of giving. They'll become enamored with the grand displays of this world. But those displays are all just frauds when it comes to who deserves our praise. We sing about the way our God came in lowliness to give us what we could never have without him: a Savior from sin.

Jesus told the critics of his parade "*I tell you, if these people would be silent, the stones would cry out.*" In other words, you can't stop God's plans. He came in lowliness but was still praised with the highest praise. He still comes near. He still is praised by those who believe. And if someone might try to silence that praise, they will fail.

God's plan is that not only will the angel's praise him at his birth, but his saints will praise him today as he comes in lowliness. And all believers who cry out "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord," will join together when he comes again in glory. Then his greatest entrance parade will take place. We will praise our living and glorified savior who once came in lowliness.

Until then we'll join the Advent hymn writer as we sing: *As angels joyed with one accord Upon the advent of our Lord, So laud we all and bless the name Of him who from the Father came. He came, not clothed in majesty Or power, as suits his deity. In lowly state he walked, till he In dying set the captives free.*