

# Lesson 1

## First Sunday in Advent

With this First Sunday in Advent, the Church begins a new year. We look ahead once again to the great festivals: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. We begin the new year as we ended the old—with eyes and hearts looking up, waiting for the return of our Lord and the beginning, not just of a new year, but of a new age. We move into Series B in the Three-Year Lectionary, in which the Holy Gospels are taken largely from the Gospel of Mark.

It was the unanimous testimony of the Early Church that this Gospel was written by John Mark. Mark's mother owned a house in Jerusalem that served as a meeting place for believers, so already as a youth, Mark had personal involvement in the Church. A relative of Barnabas, young Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first mission journey, but left them at Perga and returned to Jerusalem. When they planned their second mission journey, Barnabas wanted to take Mark along again, but Paul refused. The two finally went separate ways. Mark later became Peter's assistant and, in his Gospel, recorded Peter's eyewitness account. Mark's Gospel is succinct, unadorned, yet vivid. It was written for the Church at Rome, largely with Gentile readers in mind. It emphasizes what Jesus did more than what He said. The book as a whole is characterized as "the beginning of the Gospel"—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Apostolic preaching was the continuation of this Gospel.

### **The Holy Gospel: Mark 11:1–10**

It was a time of political and religious ferment. Zealots were engaged in guerrilla warfare against Rome, some of their leaders even claiming to be the Messiah. Expectations of the coming of the Promised One were high. John the Baptist, the voice in the desert, intensified the hope. For most Jews, the political and the religious combined in a hope for restoration of the kingdom of David and the glory of Israel. The situation was ready-made to produce the kind of popular demonstration that accompanied Jesus' deliberate fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy of the meek King coming to Jerusalem. It would be the catalyst to precipitate His arrest and condemnation and execution.

Jesus gave two of His disciples instructions. Unlike other instances when Jesus allowed His disciples to "iron out the details," this time His instructions were explicit.

Jesus' anticipation of the readiness of the owners of the colt to release it for His use proved to be correct. The colt was one "on which no one has ever sat."

1. Why were the men standing there, ready to let disciples take the animal? How does Jesus say His "The Lord has need of it" to us today?

The disciples prepared the colt with their outer robes. They and others began to catch the spirit of the occasion and carpeted the path with robes and branches. They were met by those coming out of

Jerusalem to see what was happening. Finding that Jesus was finally asserting Himself, they joined eagerly in the occasion. Psalms 113–118 provided the *Hallel* that was sung as part of the Passover. Now key phrases were chanted by those heralding Jesus' coming and welcoming Him. "Hosanna!" meant "Save now!" but had become a general exclamation of praise. "Hosanna in the highest!" connected their praise with that given by the heavenly choruses.

2. How was this especially fitting as a way of greeting Jesus as King?

"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" was definitely messianic in its thrust. "In the name of the Lord" meant more than just "as the Lord's representative" but signified the one who was bringing the "name," the revelation, of Yahweh.

3. How was this use of Psalm 118:25 especially appropriate on this occasion?

Jesus' deliberate fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy prompted the crowd to shout, "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!"

4. What expectations are seen in their acknowledging Jesus as the king who would rule on David's throne?

The crowd's enthusiastic reaction points to the spontaneity of the occasion.

5. When have you felt that kind of spontaneous enthusiasm in your worship and in your service?

In entering Jerusalem as He did, Jesus displayed the pattern of His saving work and of the Church's mission. He came in peace, not war. He conquers by His Spirit, not by might or power. Those who want to see Christianity represented by a king on a prancing horse at the head of a conquering army are missing the point of Jesus' humble service. It led Him to the cross for us and, through the cross, to the crown. As we join the crowd in His procession, we are challenged to walk His way and to trust His approach to ministry (1 Kings 19:11–18; 1 Corinthians 2:1–5).

## **The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 64:1–9**

This pericope is from the final section of Isaiah's prophecy, a proclamation of Yahweh's judgment of the nations and His salvation of His people. It is part of "the prophet's intercessory prayer." Like the priest, the prophet also interceded on the people's behalf before God.