

**Intro.:** People in many churches like praise music. They like the sound of celebration, not sadness. I once had an organist who had the habit of playing the hymns of Lent using more upbeat music. To her, and for many of us this seems natural. Who wants unhappiness? Give us joy over gloominess any day.

That may be why we love to hear the songs of the crowd at Palm Sunday. We do not really know if they people were singing or shouting, but it really doesn’t matter Either way, Matthew tells us that **“the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the lord! Hosanna in the highest!’”** Praise music, right? Well, sort of, but not really.

### **I. Hosanna - A Cry For Mercy.**

**A. “Hosanna to the Son of David!”** It sounds pretty joyful and exciting, but to really grasp what the people were saying, we have to understand what the Hebrew word means. Many people think that “Hosanna” is something like “Praise God!” But that is not correct. Hosanna actually translates as “Please save us now.” To me, that sounds a lot more like a cry for mercy than a song of praise. Save us! We are in trouble! It is a cry for help that was addressed to the Son of David, the promised Messiah. He was the one promised to sit on David’s throne forever and establish an eternal kingdom.

So, Hosanna is an appeal from helpless peasants to their King. We cannot save ourselves. We are doomed. But You, O King, can save us. So, please, save us now!

**B.** I ask you then, Is this praise music or not? Well, It really is. It is just not the kind of praise music that many people expect, or perhaps want. After all, how can a cry for mercy be called a song of praise? It is because the highest praise we can ever give to God is to confess His saving works of mercy.

Simply chanting, as many modern Christian songs do, “I love and praise You God, because you are so awesome and great!” hardly means anything at all. Yes, He is those things, but that is not a God who necessarily saves anyone. His true greatness is found in His steadfast love and mercy. It is found in His faithfulness to keep His promises to save His people. He kept His promise to David that his Son would sit upon his throne forever. That Son is Jesus Christ, the embodiment of God’s mercy in human flesh. The One who sits upon the everlasting throne of grace to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

**C.** So the truly best praise songs are when we praise God by confessing His mercy. But, here is the thing: His mercy is not completed in every way yet. There is more mercy yet to come. Christ has truly come for us and has established His kingdom by shedding His Blood. By rising from the dead He has opened that kingdom, so that all who trust in Him will be raised to everlasting life. We know that by grace, through faith, we will live in the perfect heaven and earth forever. But that is not here yet. In this veil of tears, we still struggle and suffer.

So we continue our praise song, which is our cry for mercy: Hosanna – Please, save us now. We call out to Christ to come again to raise all the dead which will signal our exit from this world of trouble, and our entrance into eternal bliss.

**D.** When we call to the Son of David in our present trouble, we do so in the certain hope that He also helps us now. “Come save us!” we cry, and in answer He comes among us, right here in our worship. Here, the Son of David speaks His saving words to us. He speaks peace to our troubled souls. He helps by giving salvation to us in His Divine Service.

Asking Him to come save us is the essence of true praise music. We confess that we are in need of saving, and we confess that He is the only Savior, the only name given to us under heaven by which we must be saved, the only way to the Father. That is, in fact, the highest praise there is.

### **II. Blessed Is He Who Comes In the Lord’s Name - Offering Sacrifice.**

**A.** The other thing the crowds called out was **“Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!”** This is a quote from Psalm 118, which begins and ends with the refrain, **“Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.”** Notice how praise is framed in terms of mercy, just as it was with, “Hosanna”, a word that is also used in Psalm 118.

So who do you think the Psalmist thinking of when he wrote that Psalm? Maybe in the immediate context it was the priests who approached the Temple of God? The house of the Lord and the altar are mentioned immediately after He wrote, **“Blessed is He who comes.”** There was, however, a greater fulfillment in Christ. He was, the great High Priest, who after being praised by the crowds went up to the House of the Lord and the Altar. He went to the Temple, and cleansed it with a whip and overturned tables. Did the Psalmist see these things? Perhaps, but it is not important, for God who gave those words did see the greater fulfillment of these words in His Son, who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. Any other fulfillment is just a pale shadow compared to that.

**B.** Christ the King is the One who comes in the Name of the Lord, the name of Yahweh. He is the very Angel of the Lord who spoke from the burning bush to identified Himself with that name. "I am that I am," He said to Moses, that is Yahweh. Christ is one with the Father and the Holy Spirit. He is Yahweh the eternal God who keeps His covenant promises with Israel. He comes in His own Name, the Name of the Lord.

Psalm 118 goes on to say what He came to do. He says, "**Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar.**" Christ came in the Name of the LORD to be the sacrifice for sin; to be slaughtered upon God's altar of judgment, the cross, for the sins of the world.

**C.** Do you think the crowd realized all this – what their praise songs were actually saying about Jesus and what He had come to do? Certainly, not all of them. Yet the words they spoke or sang are God's words. God's Spirit gave them the right things to say at the right time. Their praise song, which included, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" continued to call for God's salvation upon sinful humanity by sending the right One to be the sacrifice. This is not modern praise music, but it is the truest and greatest of all praise music.

### **III. Hosanna In The Highest - A Salvation That Comes From God.**

**A.** The final, exciting refrain of the crowds processional praise music was "**Hosanna in the highest!**" I already talked about the meaning of Hosanna. Here, though, the crowds called for salvation from the highest heaven, seeing redemption the way God designs it, not the way we would. The One who was coming was fulfilling the divine plan to bring atonement for the sins of the world.

We confess the same thing in the liturgy of the Sacrament of the Altar. During the Supper, the Body and Blood are here, on the Altar. We anticipate and desire His coming to comfort and strengthen and most importantly to forgive us. So we sing to Him, "**Hosanna in the highest!**" We need His help in this valley of the shadow of death. "**Save, O Lord!**" we cry, and He answers by coming to help us, right here from this Altar!

**B.** As the crowds anticipated His arrival, we anticipate His coming by singing the highest praise we can: "**Save us weak sinners, Lord! Hosanna in the highest!**" Instead of having our praise flow from the creativity of our own heart's, we let it flow from our deep need as sinners, and from our Lord's grace. We call upon Him who has promised to come, so our praise song is all about His faithfulness in keeping His promise. "Do this," He says of His meal. So we do it, and He gives His Body and Blood, just as He promised. He is faithful and His promise of mercy is accomplished in us.

**C.** A praise song created from our own heart would point to something else, something other than our sinfulness and His grace and mercy. It would probably point us to how loving our heart is, using words like: "I love You so much, Jesus!" Now, that should be true. We should love Him with all our heart and mind and soul. But pointing to how much we love God, is not really praising Him. It is praising us! It is praising our heart! Our praise songs should always point to His love, His mercy, His grace and faithfulness. Rather than just saying "I love You so much, Jesus" like the song given us by the crowds that day we should say something more like "I love You so much Jesus BECAUSE You gave Yourself for me, a poor, helpless sinner."

Do you see the difference? That is the kind of praise music the crowd sang for our Savior as He entered Jerusalem. A song of praise for the One who comes in the name of the Lord to Save us according to God's plan.

**Conclusion:** During this Advent, we like the crowds that day look with anticipation and desire for Christ's coming. As the Babe of Bethlehem & King who rides gentle upon a donkey to offer Himself as a sacrifice; as the One who has established His throne and still comes to us with gifts of grace and salvation in our worship; and as the One who will come again to complete His work of mercy by delivering us into glory. In the meanwhile let us continue to sing our praise music with crowd: **Hosanna, Son of David. Blessed Is He who comes in the Name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest!** Amen