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## The Expectation of Advent: Acclamations of Hope

Paul J. Grime

The season of Advent is often referred to as a penitential season. True enough. How else are we to characterize the preaching of John the Baptist, who proclaimed a Baptism of repentance? He minced no words condemning the unrepentance of the religious leaders, warning that the axe was already laid at the root of the tree (Matt 3:10) and calling for lives that displayed the fruits of repentance (Matt 3:8; Luke 3:8–14). Quite appropriately, the Proper Preface for the season speaks of “calling sinners to repentance that they might escape from the wrath to be revealed when He comes again in glory.”<sup>1</sup>

That same Proper Preface, however, points in a very different direction when it speaks of John the Baptist as the one who proclaimed Jesus “the promised Messiah, the very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”<sup>2</sup> The propers for the season quickly move beyond the penitential accents to set before the Church the hopeful expectation that permeates the four Sundays leading up to our celebration of the birth of the Savior.

In this brief study, I will consider two acclamations: “Hosanna,” from the Hebrew language, and “Maranatha,” from the Aramaic. Both are firmly established in our Advent observance, with the latter in particular giving voice to the expectation that is uniquely characteristic of Adventtide.

### I. Hosanna

The acclamation “hosanna” passes over our lips quite frequently. In the Divine Service, we sing this acclamation as our voices are joined with the seraphim—indeed, with the whole company of heaven—declaring that heaven and earth are full of God’s glory. Likewise, each year during the Procession of Palms on the Sunday of the Passion, we take up the cries of the people as they greeted Jesus during his entrance into Jerusalem: “Hosanna in the highest” (Matt 21:9).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Lutheran Service Book: Altar Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), 145.

<sup>2</sup> *LSB Altar Book*, 145.

<sup>3</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the ESV Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

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The origins of the word *hosanna*, however, have little association with the jubilation we typically associate with the word. Consider, for example, the siege of Samaria by the Syrian king Ben-hadad (2 Kgs 6:24–33). The situation had become so dire in Israel that parents were killing their children for food. In this account, a woman complains to the Israelite king that she and another woman had agreed to kill their sons for food. Having kept her part of the bargain by sacrificing her son, this woman found herself double-crossed, with the other woman now refusing to offer up her own son for the second meal. As the king passed by, the woman who had been wronged cried out, “*Help*, my lord, O king!” (v. 26; emphasis added).

Another more familiar example is found in the prayer that Hezekiah prayed in the face of what appeared to be Judah’s imminent destruction at the hand of the Assyrian king Sennacherib. First, we hear Hezekiah’s clear confession of the true God: “O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth” (2 Kgs 19:15; cf. Isa 37:16). Then, after describing Sennacherib’s taunting of the true God, Hezekiah issues this plea: “So now, O LORD our God, *save us*, please, from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, O LORD, are God alone” (v. 19; emphasis added; cf. Isa 37:20). The key plea here is “Save us, please!” Finally, consider this passage from Psalm 118: “Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!” (Ps 118:25). In all of these examples, the expression that is used is a form of a word that is well known among us: *Hosanna!* הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּהּ. It is best translated as “Save us!”<sup>4</sup>

These examples suggest that the Old Testament usage of *hosanna* is primarily one of supplication for deliverance with a clear note of urgency attached to it. Whether the appeal was made by a lowly subject to an earthly ruler<sup>5</sup> or, in the case of Hezekiah, by an earthly ruler to God, the ruler of all creation, the supplicant demonstrated a degree of confidence that genuine assistance was available.

The example of the word *hosanna* from Psalm 118 is of particular significance. The last in the grouping of the Hallel Psalms (113–118)—which were sung at the major Jewish festivals, including Passover—it is this particular text from Psalm 118 that will serve as the source for the use of the word *hosanna* during Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Before examining that usage, however, a brief examination of the Hallel Psalms will provide significant context for our understanding.

The central theme of the Passover observance was the annual rehearsal of the mighty acts of God by which he rescued his people from bondage in Egypt. This was

<sup>4</sup> A thorough study of the word is found in Donald McIlhagga, “Hosanna: Supplication and Acclamation,” *Studia Liturgica* 5, no. 3 (1966): 129–150.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to 2 Kings 6:24–33 (discussed above), another example is found at 2 Samuel 14:4.

deliverance by the hand of God *par excellence*. Twice in Exodus 12, God commanded the Israelites to keep this feast as a memorial (vv. 14, 24). Later, he provided the answer they were to give to their children when asked about the meaning of this observance: “You shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses’” (v. 27).

That theme of rescue was central to the celebration of the Passover and permeates the Hallel Psalms. For example, Psalm 113 makes clear that the true God alone sits in the heavens (vv. 4–6). The remainder of the psalm then provides specific examples of what this God can do for his people:

<sup>7</sup>He raises the poor from the dust  
and lifts the needy from the ash heap,  
<sup>8</sup>to make them sit with princes,  
with the princes of his people.  
<sup>9</sup>He gives the barren woman a home,  
making her the joyous mother of children.  
Praise the LORD!

This is the God with whom nothing is impossible. Similarities are easily seen with the Song of Hannah (1 Sam 2:5, 8) and the Magnificat (Luke 1:52).

Psalm 114, which follows immediately, provides direct context for the celebration of the Passover. Reference is made not only to the waters of the Red Sea fleeing before the Israelites but also the Jordan River as its waters ceased to flow so that the Israelites could cross over to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 3).

It was after the praying of these two psalms that the Israelites ate the Passover meal. When the meal was concluded, they then sang the remainder of the Hallel Psalms.<sup>6</sup> Psalm 115 provides a stark contrast between the God of Israel and the false gods of the world, which are made of silver and gold but are not living (vv. 2–8). The psalm concludes with a threefold call to trust in God for he alone “is their help and their shield” (vv. 9–11).

This language of confident trust that God will provide rescue for his people continues in Psalm 116:

<sup>3</sup>The snares of death encompassed me;  
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;  
I suffered distress and anguish.

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<sup>6</sup> In all likelihood, the “hymn” that Jesus and the disciples sang before proceeding to the Mount of Olives would have been these four psalms (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26). Jeffrey Gibbs rightly points out, however, the caution one must employ in assigning later Jewish practice to the first century. See Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew 21:1–28:20* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018), 1416.

<sup>4</sup>Then I called on the name of the LORD:

“O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!” . . .

<sup>8</sup>For you have delivered my soul from death,  
my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling.

Psalm 117, the shortest of all the psalms, does not use the language of supplication; rather, it articulates the reason for all our praise of God:

<sup>2</sup>For great is his steadfast love toward us,  
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.

The last of the Hallel Psalms, Psalm 118, brings this collection of songs to its culmination. The psalm begins with a continuation of the confession of God’s faithfulness heard in the previous psalm, with the psalmist proclaiming four times, “his steadfast love endures forever” (vv. 1–4). An extended confession of God’s deliverance is then set forth:

<sup>5</sup>Out of my distress I called on the LORD;  
the LORD answered me and set me free.

<sup>6</sup>The LORD is on my side; I will not fear.  
What can man do to me?

<sup>7</sup>The LORD is on my side as my helper;  
I shall look in triumph on those who hate me.

Not in princes but in the Lord do God’s people take refuge (vv. 8–9). When surrounded by enemies on every side, the psalmist declares no less than three times, “In the name of the LORD I cut them off” (vv. 10–12). The confession of God’s defense of his people proclaims:

<sup>13</sup>I was pushed hard, so that I was falling,  
but the LORD helped me.

Two times the psalmist declares, “The right hand of the LORD does valiantly” (vv. 15–16), culminating in this exquisite confession, a favorite of Luther’s,<sup>7</sup>

<sup>17</sup>I shall not die, but I shall live,  
and recount the deeds of the LORD.

Though the psalmist acknowledges that the struggles of life may be a result of the Lord’s discipline, he lives in the confidence that God will not give him over to death (v. 18). Rather, he can rejoice in the truth that the Lord is his salvation (vv. 14, 21).

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<sup>7</sup> Martin Luther, “I Shall Not Die, But Live” (1545): 53, 337 in *Luther’s Works, American Edition*, vols. 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–76); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–86); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T.G. Mayes (St. Louis: Concordia, 2009–).

The psalmist continues with the readily familiar passage regarding the “stone that the builders rejected” that Jesus would apply to himself in predicting his own death (vv. 22–23; cf. Matt 21:42). And then there is the glorious acclamation,

<sup>24</sup>This is the day that the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

that already in the early church was identified with the day of salvation, that is, Easter, and its weekly celebration on the Lord’s Day—Sunday.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, we come to the reason for this examination of the Hallel Psalms:

<sup>25</sup>Save us, we pray, O LORD!  
O LORD, we pray, give us success!

<sup>26</sup>Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD!  
We bless you from the house of the LORD.

The phrase “save us” is none other than a translation of our word of supplication—*hosanna*, הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּהּ—that we noted in other places in the Old Testament. One last time the psalmist pleads with God to do as he has promised and come to the aid of his faithful servants: “O LORD, we pray: help us!” In the context of the entire psalm, as well as the five preceding psalms, this supplication to God acknowledges that our rescue from calamity and death is found in no one else. The first and last verses of the psalm reframe our assessment of life in this world. Confident that God can and will come to our aid, our petition is one of joy:

<sup>1,29</sup>Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
for his steadfast love endures forever!

It is important to note that the Septuagint consistently uses the word σωζω to translate הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּהּ. The common translation, which is found in most English Bibles, is the obvious choice: “to save.” Of some interest is the fact that the name *Jesus* comes from the same root word in Hebrew: ישע. Its first appearance in the New Testament provides us with an unmistakable connection between the Old Testament plea for help—for salvation—and the name the angel told Joseph in the dream to give to the child who would be born of Mary: “She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). Thus, when the crowds would later greet Jesus during his triumphal entry into Jerusalem with shouts of hosanna—“save us”—they were only making plain what the name *Jesus* already proclaimed: that this was the one who could accomplish the salvation of God’s people. He alone could rescue and save them.

When the Gospel writers penned their accounts of Jesus’ triumphal entry, it is somewhat surprising to discover that they did not follow the Septuagint by using the

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<sup>8</sup> John Mason Neale and Richard Frederick Littledale, *A Commentary on the Psalms: From Primitive and Medieval Writers*, 4 vols. (London: Joseph Masters and Co., 1887), 3:527–528.

word  $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$  to translate the Hebrew; rather, they simply transliterated the word in each of its six occurrences, using Greek letters to arrive at  $\acute{\omega}\sigma\alpha\nu\nu\acute{\alpha}$ .<sup>9</sup> Because this bears no resemblance to the name of Jesus— $\text{Ἰησοῦς}$ —it is not clear whether the meaning of the word *hosanna*, and particularly its association with the name *Jesus*, would have been apparent to later generations.

While it is impossible to say with certainty why the Gospel writers chose to transliterate the Hebrew for *hosanna* into Greek, it is likely by that time that the actual meaning of the word had become secondary to its function as a general acclamation of praise.<sup>10</sup> The reality is that this acclamatory function was already evident in the Old Testament. The prophet Jeremiah, for example, calls on God to save in a manner very different than the woman who appealed to the king in 2 Kings 6:

Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,  
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;  
proclaim, give praise, and say,  
“O LORD, save [יְהוָה] your people,  
the remnant of Israel.”

(Jer 31:7)

There is still an appeal for God to come to the aid of his people, but the gist is more that of an appeal for the king to do his kingly duty. One could liken it, for example, to the acclamation “God save the queen!” As much as a cry for help, it portrays a sense of joyful anticipation as the king makes his entrance.<sup>11</sup> Such would have likely been the case as Jesus made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem to shouts of “Hosanna in the highest!”

The question remains regarding how later generations would have understood the transliterated word  $\acute{\omega}\sigma\alpha\nu\nu\acute{\alpha}$ . Its full meaning may not have been readily apparent, just as may have been the case with the transliteration of the Hebrew words *alleluia* and *amen* in other places in the New Testament. Context, of course, would have been of some help. The four occurrences of *alleluia* in Revelation 19, for example, can hardly be understood as anything other than a cry of exuberance. In all likelihood, the church’s catechesis would have played a role. Consider, for example,

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<sup>9</sup> This is no different than the use of the word *alleluia* in Revelation 19. Here also, the Greek letters simply produce the sound of the Hebrew words that mean “praise the Lord.”

<sup>10</sup> *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v.  $\acute{\omega}\sigma\alpha\nu\nu\acute{\alpha}$ , revision ed., Moisés Silva, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2014), 4:745–746.

<sup>11</sup> *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 1:99–100.



the explanation Justin Martyr quite casually gives in his *First Apology* regarding the meaning of the word *amen*: “When the presider has concluded these prayers and the thanksgiving, all present express their consent by saying ‘Amen.’ In Hebrew this word means ‘so be it.’”<sup>12</sup> One can imagine similar catechesis regarding the word *hosanna*.<sup>13</sup>

Whether the word was fully understood or not, it clearly became associated early in the church’s practice with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. The acclamation of *hosanna* appears, for example, already in the *Didache*, that manual of church practice that dates perhaps to the final years of the first century. Here the word occurs in the context of the eucharistic celebration, bearing in particular an eschatological focus: “May grace come, and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David.”<sup>14</sup> Though not tied to the “holy, holy, holy” of Isaiah 6 at this point, that pairing was only a few centuries from becoming the common practice in nearly the entire church, even to the present day. The Lutheran reformers retained the *hosanna* for the same reason we do, for there is no better way to confess the truth that our God is not some king in a distant land or a higher being locked away in heaven; rather, he comes to us here and now, giving his very body and blood that was shed for our salvation.

There is no better time to emphasize the meaning of the *hosanna* than during the season of Advent. On account of the traditional reading of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem on the First Sunday in Advent, it should not be surprising to find *hosannas* on our tongues, and no more so than in the Advent hymns. Two examples in particular demonstrate the varying meanings of the word already apparent in the Old Testament. In the hymn “O Bride of Christ, Rejoice,” the word functions in the refrain more as an acclamation:

Hosanna, praise, and glory!

Our King, we bow before Thee. (*LSB* 335)

In the hymn “Lift Up Your Heads, You Everlasting Doors,” however, we find a clear example of the supplication that corresponds to the literal meaning of the word:

Hosanna, Lord! Messiah, come and save

From sin and grave. (*LSB* 339:2)

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<sup>12</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 65 in Lawrence J. Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church: An Anthology of Historical Sources*, 4 vols. (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2009), 1:68.

<sup>13</sup> A similar form of catechesis is found in *Lutheran Service Book*, where all three transliterated words are defined, in addition to footnotes explaining the meaning of *hosanna* where it occurs in the *Sanctus*. See *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), xxiv, 161, 178, 195, 208 [hereafter, *LSB*]. Note that another transliteration, *Sabaoth*, is defined in the two places where it occurs; see 195 and 208.

<sup>14</sup> *Didache* 10.6 in Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:38.

This season, more than any other, invites us to appropriate both uses of the word, as the church not only continues to issue her call for God to save his people but also acclaims her coming king, who graciously brings life for all.

## II. Maranatha

There is another ancient word that gives voice to the deep longing of the faithful and is especially fitting during Adventtide. Unlike the word *hosanna*, this is not so much a plea for immediate help and deliverance as it is an appeal for the Lord to keep his promise and make his final return. I speak here of the word *maranatha*—“our Lord, come.” The word occurs once in the New Testament, at the end of 1 Corinthians (16:22) where the transliterated form of the Aramaic appears. However, a Greek translation of the word also appears at the very end of the Revelation to St. John (22:20). The significance of this expression cannot be emphasized enough and deserves, I would suggest, more attention than it has typically received.

Studies of the occurrence of the word *maranatha* in 1 Corinthians 16 point out the ambiguity of the Aramaic word, raising the question of how it should be interpreted.<sup>15</sup> Actually consisting of two words, *maranatha* can be divided in two different ways. The preponderance of evidence lies with the division *marana tha*, which is literally translated: “our Lord, come!” This imperatival form corresponds to its occurrence at the end of Revelation, “Come, Lord Jesus!” [ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ] (22:20). There is, however, also the possibility that the Aramaic could be divided as *maran atha*, which would change the imperative to an indicative: “the Lord has come,” thus functioning not as a plea but as a confession of faith. The difference between these two forms is not that great in that the church’s constant plea for the Lord to come would be an empty appeal were it not the case that he has already come. Because the Lord has come, we are thus able to pray, “Come, Lord Jesus.”

The appearance of the phrase in Revelation 22, here in Greek translation, leaves little doubt of a strongly eschatological focus. Already in verse 17, we hear the cry: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’” Even more pointed are the words of Jesus that immediately precede the *maranatha*: “Surely I am coming soon” (v. 20). Some scholars have suggested that these final verses of Revelation are actually a liturgical dialogue. Thus, the words of Jesus, “Surely I am coming soon,” might have been spoken by the pastor, with the congregation replying, “Come, Lord Jesus!”<sup>16</sup> While

<sup>15</sup> See Gregory J. Lockwood, *1 Corinthians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 626–627, 632–633; Louis A. Brighton, *Revelation* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 657–658; and Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:38 n. c.

<sup>16</sup> See David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, World Biblical Commentary 52C (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 1206–1208, where Aune summarizes various proposals.

such proposals cannot be proven, they do raise an interesting prospect concerning the relationship of the *maranatha* to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, a topic addressed below.

It is beneficial, first of all, to return to the use of the *maranatha* at the end of 1 Corinthians. Given the unambiguous understanding of the term in Revelation—the plea for Jesus to come—it makes sense to go with the same interpretation in this context: “our Lord, come!” That is in fact how nearly all English Bibles translate the word. This interpretation in turn corroborates a similar emphasis throughout 1 Corinthians. For example, Paul's thanksgiving at the very beginning of the letter speaks of waiting “for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:7). Similarly, near the end Paul urges the Corinthians: “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith” (16:13). Most significant of all is Paul's reference in his account of the Lord's Supper that those who partake of the Lord's body and blood are proclaiming the Lord's death “until he comes” (11:26).

This reference to the Lord's coming in the context of the Eucharist leads to another, and rather significant, occurrence of the *maranatha* that appears in the *Didache*, just two lines after the *hosanna* that was mentioned earlier.<sup>17</sup> The general opinion in earlier scholarship was that this occurrence in the *Didache* argued rather strongly for the *maranatha* as a eucharistic liturgical formula, especially given its appearance in Aramaic, which suggested a very ancient formula.<sup>18</sup> Other scholars, however, have disputed this theory, suggesting that the *maranatha* is tied to the anathema in 1 Corinthians 16 and not the Eucharist.<sup>19</sup>

When comparing all three occurrences of the word, two in Aramaic and one in Greek, an interesting parallel is revealed:

### 1 Corinthians 16

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<sup>17</sup> *Didache* 10.6, Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:38; the quotation appears in the chart nearby. For a survey of the interpretative difficulty surrounding chapters 9 and 10 of the *Didache*, see Paul F. Bradshaw, “Yet Another Explanation of *Didache* 9–10,” *Studia Liturgica* 36, no. 1 (2006): 124–128.

<sup>18</sup> See the discussion in C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1968; reprint New York: Harper and Row, 1987), 398; also *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:896; and Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper: A Study in the History of the Liturgy*, trans. Dorothea H. G. Reeve (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 193–194.

<sup>19</sup> This perspective was first introduced by C. F. D. Moule, “A Reconsideration of the Context of *Maranatha*,” *New Testament Studies* 6, no. 4 (1960): 307–310. Colin Brown restates this view by adding his own section to the original entry on the term *maranatha* in the *Theologisches Begriffslexikon zum Neuen Testament*. See *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2:896–898.

<sup>22</sup>*If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. **Our Lord, come!** [Maranatha!]*

#### Revelation 22

<sup>18</sup>**I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book:** *if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, <sup>19</sup>and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. <sup>20</sup>He who testifies to these things says, “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen.*

**Come, Lord Jesus!**

#### Didache 10.6

**May grace come, and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If anyone is holy, let him come; if anyone is not, let him do penance. Maranatha.**

What this comparison reveals is that in all three occurrences of the *maranatha* (words appearing in boldface) some form of an anathema (words appearing in italics) also occurs. Far from ruling out any eucharistic connection, one can see a natural connection, as C. K. Barrett explains:

The prayer of thanksgiving in the *Didache* . . . seeks the coming of the Lord that he may gather together the church, and bring it into the kingdom; this gathering together will naturally involve the exclusion of those who do not belong to God’s people. So here: the Lord’s coming, for which the elect long as their salvation, would confirm the ban on those who do not *love the Lord*.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the gathering of the faithful at the altar to receive the Lord as he comes to us now gives a foretaste of the final messianic banquet in more ways than one. The plea for the Lord to come must always be in the context of the judgment that exists between those who love the Lord and those who do not. That judgment, which will be plain to all at the last day, is in a sense enacted even now when the church judges either the conduct or the confession of the individual. That judgment finds its expression most acutely at the altar rail, where, with a heavy heart, we admit only those who can truthfully pray, “Come, Lord Jesus!” in all its fullness.

The eucharistic use of the *maranatha*, however, requires further attention. Hermann Sasse, more than anyone else in our Lutheran circles, has championed the significance of this acclamation in providing a rich understanding of the Lord’s

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<sup>20</sup> Barrett, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 398.

Supper.<sup>21</sup> In his celebrated book on the Lord's Supper, *This Is My Body*, he writes at length:

The petition 'Come, Lord Jesus!' is already fulfilled in his Real Presence in the Sacrament. This coming of the Lord in the Real Presence makes the Lord's Day a day of unspeakable joy, a day of praise and thanksgiving. It makes the Eucharist not only an anticipation of the blessed future, but also a participation in the eternal worship in heaven. . . .

It is this Sacrament that made it possible for the church to survive what in the eyes of the world must have been the greatest disappointment, the delay of his *parousia*. This Sacrament has accompanied the Church throughout the centuries, and will accompany her to the end of the world, even to the Last Day when he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.<sup>22</sup>

Elsewhere, Sasse addresses the question of how the ancient church, not to mention the church in every age, was able to face the disappointment that understandably resulted from the delay of Christ's return. The answer lies in the *maranatha*, which, Sasse contends, is, "next to the Words of Institution . . . the most ancient portion of the eucharistic liturgy" and properly "belongs on account of its content to every celebration of the Lord's Supper." How can the church continue to pray "Come, Lord Jesus!" while the waiting goes on and on? On account of the Lord's Supper! "Because the Church possesses this Sacrament, she can wait for centuries and millennia on end. The Supper bridges the space of time between Jesus' days on earth and his return." Thus, "each eucharistic celebration of the church is a repetition of the first Supper and a prolepsis of the final supper."<sup>23</sup>

It was this insistence and encouragement of Sasse, more than anything else, that led to the liturgical recovery of the *maranatha* as an option in Settings One and Two in *Lutheran Service Book*. Immediately following the Words of Our Lord, the pastor continues with the words with which St. Paul concludes the *Verba*: "As often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (see 1 Cor 11:26). The eschatological dimension that runs through Paul's entire letter reaches a significant inflection point here at his discussion of the Supper. At the heart of the celebration is the reality that the death of Christ—and all that that

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<sup>21</sup> Martin Franzmann makes a brief reference to the *maranatha* in 1 Corinthians 16:20 as the "eucharistic cry." Martin H. Franzmann, *The Revelation to John* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1976), 146.

<sup>22</sup> Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther's Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Adelaide, South Australia: Lutheran Publishing House, 1959, 1977), 325, 326.

<sup>23</sup> Hermann Sasse, "Church and Lord's Supper: An Essay on the Understanding of the Sacrament of the Altar," in *The Lonely Way: Selected Essays and Letters*, vol. 1, trans. Matthew C. Harrison et al. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2001), 393, 394.

entails—is made evident in the eating and drinking. Yet, this feasting is not merely a looking-back-in-time moment, because it is always done with an eye to the future—to his final coming.

The fitting congregational response to Paul’s “until he comes,” then, is a hearty amen followed by the *maranatha*: “Come, Lord Jesus.”<sup>24</sup> Placed in the mouths of the communicants, these words bring to our attention a significant aspect of this sacred meal that we find nowhere else in the Divine Service. While the catechism rightly draws our attention to the chief thing in the sacrament—the forgiveness of sins, along with the eating and drinking—the *maranatha* broadens our confession in order to give us necessary perspective regarding the Lord’s promise—namely, that the one who comes to us now is the one who will surely come again.

This perspective concerning the Lord’s Supper is one that is ready-made for special emphasis during the season of Advent. The sacrament is, to be sure, all about the forgiveness of sins; Jesus says so himself! Likewise, it is the meal of consolation and peace, of cleansing and healing, of strength and eternal repose. It is, however, to our detriment when we fail to take note that it is just as much the banquet of hope, setting before us with absolute certainty the promise that the Lord will indeed come again. We know this because he comes to us now, again and again, feeding us his life-giving body and his death-destroying blood.

Like the season of Advent, the Lord’s Supper is punctuated by the hope of the Lord’s return. And where there is hope, there is most certainly joy. In the context of the Supper, this joy is most suitably expressed through the imagery of the messianic banquet, of which the sacrament is a “foretaste of the feast to come.” Similarly, in the Prayer of Thanksgiving in Settings One and Two of *LSB* we make our plea to God:

Gather us together, we pray, from the ends of the earth to celebrate with all the faithful the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. (*LSB*, 161, 178)

In Setting Four, the Preface takes us through the order of salvation, culminating with the resurrection of Christ and the implication for our own resurrection:

Because He is now risen from the dead and lives and reigns to all eternity, all who believe in Him will overcome sin and death and will rise again to new life. (*LSB*, 208)

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<sup>24</sup> See *LSB*, 162, 179. Note how both the amen and maranatha follow the pattern in Revelation 22:20.

Similar to the presence of the maranatha in the Proclamation of Christ in Settings One and Two, Setting Four incorporates the actual words in the seasonal Prayer of Thanksgiving for Advent, linking our heightened expectation of the coming Messiah with his coming in the Holy Supper:

In Your boundless mercy You sent Your servant, John the Baptist, to proclaim that in Christ the kingdom of heaven draws near.

With thankful hearts we pray, “Come, Lord Jesus,” confident that in His body and blood, given us to eat and drink, we receive the forgiveness of sins and so proclaim His death until He comes again in glory.<sup>25</sup>

Moving beyond the ordinary of the service, there are two sets of Advent propers that seemingly take their cue from the maranatha: the Collects of the Day and the Great “O” Antiphons. The collects for the First, Second, and Fourth Sundays in Advent, often referred to as the “stir up” collects, break the classic collect form with their bold plea for God to come to the rescue:

Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come, that by Your protection we may be rescued from the threatening perils of our sins and saved by Your mighty deliverance. . . . [Advent 1]

Stir up Your power, O Lord, and come and help us by Your might, that the sins which weigh us down may be quickly lifted by Your grace and mercy. [Advent 4]<sup>26</sup>

These two collects in particular not only draw upon the fervent plea for the Lord to come but also incorporate the meaning of the hosanna, using words like “rescued” and “help.”

The Great “O” Antiphons, based on Old Testament names for the preincarnate Christ, each conclude with the same plea, “Come.”<sup>27</sup> As Advent draws to a close, the last seven days are punctuated by this incessant plea. Of note, again, is the incorporation of the hosanna theme in more than half of the antiphons:

Come quickly to deliver us. (December 19)

Come and rescue the prisoners. (December 20)

Come and save us all. (December 22)

Come and save us, O Lord our God. (December 23)

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<sup>25</sup> *LSB Altar Book*, 266.

<sup>26</sup> *LSB Altar Book*, 649, 653.

<sup>27</sup> The antiphons are printed opposite the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” (*LSB* 357), which is based on the antiphons.

Finally, the cry of the maranatha appears in a number of hymns for both Advent and the end times. Perhaps the most obvious is the direct quotation of Revelation 22:20 in the hymn “Christ Is Surely Coming”:

“Surely I come quickly!  
Come, Lord Jesus, come!” (*LSB* 509:3)

Likewise, the final stanza of “Once He Came in Blessing” makes a similar plea:

Come, then, O Lord Jesus,  
From our sins release us. (*LSB* 333:4)

The hymn “O Savior, Rend the Heavens Wide,” drawing on the vivid imagery of Isaiah 64:1, nicely echoes the maranatha:

O Savior, rend the heavens wide;  
Come down, come down with mighty stride;  
Unlock the gates, the doors break down;  
Unbar the way to heaven’s crown. (*LSB* 355:1)

Drawing on Genesis 3, the hymn “What Hope! An Eden Prophesied” portrays the *telos* of the church’s maranatha:

Come, Jesus, come, Messiah Lord,  
Lost Paradise restore;  
Lead past the angel’s flaming sword—  
Come, open heaven’s door. (*LSB* 342:4)

The urgency of the Lord’s return is beautifully depicted in the concluding lines of “The King Shall Come When Morning Dawns”:

Hail, Christ the Lord! Your people pray:  
Come quickly, King of kings! (*LSB* 348:5)

Other hymns that echo the plea for the Lord to come include *LSB* 334:6; 511 (refrain), 338:1; and 515:4. Though not in the Advent section, the last stanza of “Come, Ye Thankful People, Come” paints a similar picture: “Even so, Lord, quickly come” (*LSB* 892:4).

To conclude our discussion, we turn, finally, to the king and queen of the chorales, both written by Philipp Nicolai. In the latter, “O Morning Star, How Fair and Bright,” the deep yearning of the faithful is given voice through the maranatha:

Amen! Amen!  
Come, Lord Jesus!  
Crown of gladness!  
We are yearning  
For the day of Your returning! (*LSB* 395:6)



Though traditionally associated with Epiphany, this hymn, or at least selected stanzas of it, is fitting at almost any time of the year. In the king of the chorales, “Wake, Awake, for Night Is Flying,” the imagery of the parable of the ten virgins from Matthew 25 is used to its full potential as we are placed in the story:

Now come, Thou Blessèd One,  
Lord Jesus, God’s own Son,  
Hail! Hosanna!  
We enter all  
The wedding hall  
To eat the Supper at Thy call. (*LSB* 516:2)

The clear sacramental language, missing in the translations that appeared in *The Lutheran Hymnal* and *Lutheran Worship*, perfectly aligns the maranatha with the Supper around which we gather each Lord’s Day, all the while pointing us toward the final marriage feast.

The “prayer of unshakable Christian hope”—that was Hermann Sasse’s pithy yet compelling description of the maranatha.<sup>28</sup> From her earliest beginnings, the church has clung to that expectant plea, arising from the confident confession that the Lord who has come in the flesh will come again. Thus do we begin our annual rehearsal of our Lord’s saving deeds each Advent, greeting him who comes into our midst with shouts of “Hosanna!” in the sure and certain hope that the one who has rescued us from death and the grave will come quickly.

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<sup>28</sup> Sasse, “Church and Lord’s Supper,” 394.