**The Holy Gospel, according to Luke 23:33-43**

**33**When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. **34**Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they cast lots to divide his clothing. **35**And the people stood by watching, but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” **36**The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine **37**and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” **38**There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.” **39**One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” **40**But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? **41**And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.” **42**Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom.” **43**He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

This is the Gospel of Christ

Please be seated

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the final Sunday of the Christian year. The New Year for us begins on the first Sunday of Advent – which is next Sunday 27th. Not January 1st.

Christ the King Sunday completes the cycle of Jesus’ life. Jesus, who came to earth as a child born in Bethlehem.

We’ve spent the whole year tracing this remarkable progression from this humblest of beginnings to the most exalted state imaginable. And what I hope you’ll see as we go along is the common thread of humility. It’s not only the dominant trait of Jesus’ life, but also the model by which we’re are Christians. Mark explained the model.

“He sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, “If any man wants to be first, he shall be last of all, and servant of all.”
He took a little child, and set him in the middle of them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, “Whoever receives one such little child in my name, receives me, and whoever receives me, doesn’t receive me, but him who sent me.”

As we know, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a little village about five miles south of Jerusalem which was hardly the centre of influence, wealth, and power. It was brought about because Joseph had to return there to register for the census required by Rome. Bethlehem always sounds to me rather romantic, but the particular place where he was born was the lowliest of places – a stable – among the animals. Mary laid him in a manger on top of the hay. Jesus’ birth was a portrait of the humility which would continue through his life.

Joseph and Mary took their baby to be dedicated at the temple when he was about six days old. Then they returned to Nazareth, where he grew up.

 In Jesus’ time Nazareth was a small hamlet in the of Galilee. You won’t find it on the “Ten Most Desirable towns” in which to live. When Philip told Nathanael that he’d found the Messiah and that he was from Nazareth, Nathanael said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” If you think that sums it up, remember that a number of historic figures came from humble places like Nazareth. Well, our Jacinda was born in Morrinsville!

So, Jesus grew up in Nazareth, ostensibly, the son of a carpenter. Joseph is often pictured in a wood shop with a wooden mallet in his hand working on a piece of furniture. But, in Jesus’ day, a carpenter was much more than a craftsman who worked with wood. A carpenter was a builder, who worked with stone and metal, as well as wood. It was a respectable trade for working class men.

The biggest construction project at the time was in the city of Sepphoris, just three miles from Nazareth, where Herod Antipas was building his new capital. It was a typical Roman city with wide streets and formidable buildings made of limestone and covered with marble. It had a large amphitheatre which is still there and may be viewed today.

Many speculate Joseph would have worked as a stonemason on this project. If so, by the time Jesus was twelve or thirteen years old, it is thought that he would have begun his apprenticeship, working alongside his father. What we do know is that whatever he did, he did for a living for about fifteen years. Then he left his trade and devoted the rest of his life to heralding the Kingdom of God.

He sought out his cousin, John, and was baptized in the Jordan River, then he went out into the desert to fast and pray. When he returned to Nazareth, he went to the synagogue and preached his first sermon.

Given the fact that he was the Son of God, you’d think this would’ve been the greatest sermon ever heard. But no, it almost cost him his life. The elders were incensed, so you could say that Jesus’ ministry had a humble and controversial beginning, at best.

He left Nazareth and moved to Capernaum. From this point on he lived by the good graces of those who invited him to stay at their homes and eat at their tables.

As time progressed, Jesus gathered his disciples and taught them how to live as part of God’s kingdom on earth. They travelled around Galilee together teaching others and sharing the Good News of God’s grace and love. But it was Jesus, not the disciples, that the people wanted to hear, and they followed him everywhere he went.

The question is: Was he acclaimed because of his greatness, or did the crowds pursue him because of what they hoped he could do for them? After all, he’d healed the sick, raised the dead and fed the multitudes. Were they hoping to be disciples, or were they just looking to be healed, or hoping to witness a miracle? You’d think that, after all Jesus did for them, the people of Galilee would’ve worshiped him and glorified him and honoured him with all sorts of praise and adoration, but apparently, some were only hoping for a quick fix and a free ticket to heaven.

After three years in Galilee, Jesus headed for Jerusalem. It was the beginning of the end.

His “triumphal entry” into the holy city on a donkey was sensational. The temple leaders were mortified at his popularity, met him at the base of the Mount of Olives, and admonished him for creating such a scene. It was the first of several confrontations in what was to be a busy week for him, and by the end of the week, they had him arrested and brought before the Council.

The elders first heard the testimony of false witnesses, who contradicted each other. So, the high priest asked Jesus outright, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” Jesus replied, “You say that I am”.

Well, in spite of this careful response, they took him to Pilate and charged him with treason, saying that he claimed to be king of the Jews. Pilate didn’t want to have anything to do with it, so he turned to the crowd and offered them a choice – shall I free Jesus or a convicted killer named Barabbas?

Cynically, many of the crowd who may have welcomed Jesus to Jerusalem just days before – called for Barabbas. As for Jesus, they shouted, “Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate turned him over to the soldiers, who scourged him, clothed him with purple, and weaving a crown of thorns, they put it on him. They began to salute him, “Hail, King of the Jews!” In spite of the humiliation and shame, he quietly endured it all. After all this, Jesus was forced to carry his cross to the hill of Golgotha, where he was nailed to the beams and hanged between two thieves to die. From the cradle to the tomb, his life was a portrait of humility.

But, Jesus’ death was not the end of the story. On the third day he rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples, then to a number of people in various places. After forty days, he ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

From birth to death, from death to eternal glory, the humble Saviour became our exalted Lord. But it’s more than a story, it’s a way of life, with humility and forgiveness as the key. We see this over and over in recollections by witnesses to his life.

God pours out his mercies on those who are humble, while those who are proud might walk away empty handed. Individually, all that’s necessary to experience new life in Christ is to confess your need of him and call on his name. Individually, and collectively, as a church … even as a nation … the promise is the same. In fact, Jesus made it simple: Let go of your arrogance, pride and pretence and lay down your life for others, to the glory of God; for in dying, you will be born again into a life that can never be taken away.

To God be the glory, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.