

The Divine Service: Sanctus

4th–6th C.

**☐ Holy, holy, holy Lord God of Sabaoth;
heav'n and earth are full of Thy glory.
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is He, blessed is He, blessed is He
that cometh in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna in the highest.**

Isaiah 6:3; Matthew 21:9

The *Sanctus* has since about the fourth century joined the worship of the church on earth to that of “angels, archangels and all the company of heaven.” In its opening words we sing the song of the angels in heaven, heard by Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1–7) and suggested also by John in his Revelation (Rev 4:6), where all the saints join in (Rev 4:8–11). What is about to happen to Isaiah when he hears these words? Why might the Church have considered them particularly appropriate just before the Lord’s Supper? How does John’s Revelation also suggest we sing these words now (Rev 19:6–9)?

Interestingly, Isaiah hears “the earth is full of Thy glory;” the Church adds that heaven is, too. We think of the *Sanctus* as a heavenly song come down to earth, and I suppose it is. But the action is the other way, reminding us of Christ’s glorification *on earth* (John 12:27–33) and his subsequent ascension to fill *heaven too* with his glory (and to be present, from the right hand of God, everywhere with his Church, John 14:18–28; Eph 4:8–16). This first part of the *Sanctus* was sung at the Lord’s Supper already in Rome at the end of the first century.

The second part of the *Sanctus* is joined (in the Western church, since about the sixth century) to the *Holy, Holy, Holy* from the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday (Matt 21). Expectant crowds greeted their Lord, come among them to save, though they knew not yet how, with the words of Psalm 118:25–26. “Hosanna!” means “Save us now!” Here Christ again enters humbly, “mounted on” bread and wine, but in true body and blood, to save us with the forgiveness of sins. Lutheran churches retained the custom of singing this passage, which welcomed the flesh-and-blood Jesus; Reformed churches, denying his real presence, typically omitted it. A custom observed by some, to cross oneself at the words, “blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord,” emphasizes that this one comes to save you!

The Palm Sunday crowd got more from Jesus than they expected, although at first it seemed much less. Their words proved truer than they knew at the time. What do you think you will get out of being here today? What do the precious words of the *Sanctus*, and their scriptural connections, remind you that Jesus is coming here to give?