

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Palm Sunday, March 20, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 161, 162:2, 160, 244, 130:1.

Lessons: 1 Kings 1: 5-35, Philippians 2:5-11, Matthew 21:1-17.

Sermon Text: John 12:12-19

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Most of us don't want to go somewhere and do something which we think will work out badly for us. We don't look forward to going somewhere where we aren't welcome. We would rather skip such a trip.

In our sermons this Lenten season, we have reviewed some key events in the final 24 hours of Jesus' life on earth. Today we go back a few days, to the day Jesus came into Jerusalem in preparation for the climax of his life. On the day we call Palm Sunday, an event happened which we call Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus came into the city where he would die and he allowed the people to praise and welcome him gladly. Jesus knew all that he was going to endure and suffer for us. Yet he came into Jerusalem willingly, to teach and to suffer and die. Today let's review

JESUS' ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

- 1. He comes humbly,**
- 2. Yet he is welcomed as a king, as the Messiah.**

How many times have you heard this history lesson? Yet every time we read something in Scripture, we may recognize and learn something we didn't notice before.

Notice the humble way Jesus comes into Jerusalem. Even in Jesus' day kings wouldn't normally ride on a donkey to enter a great city! We'd expect a king to be coming on a beautiful horse, maybe a white horse with lots of attendants and soldiers to help protect him and show his prestige. How does a president or a king travel today? Not just a little old car, but in a big limousine with lots of police and media attending him.

But Jesus came humbly and gently, not with an attacking army. *"This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: 'Say to the Daughter of Zion, "See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."'"* Matthew 21:4-5. As you heard in our Old Testament lesson, there is a remarkable precedent for this.

There is great deal of significance beyond humility found in the donkey, the mule. Near the end of King David's life, his son Adonijah decided to claim the throne for himself. He got the support of Joab, the commander of David's army, Abiathar, a priest, all his brothers except Solomon, and all the royal officials of Judah. He even staged a coronation of sorts to which he invited all these people; but Nathan the prophet, Zadok the high priest, and Adonijah's brother Solomon were not invited. When David heard about this, *"King David said, 'Call in Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada.' When they came before the king, he said to them: 'Take your lord's servants with you and set Solomon my son on my own mule and take him down to Gihon. There have Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpet and shout, "Long live King Solomon!" Then you are to go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah.'"* 1 Kings 1:32-35 (NIV)

Jesus riding the donkey brought to mind the true king, the true Son of David. This showed that David had personally selected Solomon as the king's successor.

When the people welcomed Jesus on this day, John tells us they were shouting about Jesus as ***“the king of Israel”***.

With this picture of Jesus being welcomed today as a king, we are reminded of two things. First, we remember Jesus’ conversations with Pontius Pilate about being a king. Second, we remember the Jews rejecting Jesus, who was the rightful and spiritual king of Israel and telling Pilate “we have no king but Caesar” when they were insisting Jesus be crucified.

Seeing Jesus on the donkey must have brought this event in their history to mind. After all, they don’t simply sing “Hosanna,” but they adapt Psalm 118: ***“O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.”*** Psalm 118:25-26 (NIV)

Matthew reports these words: ***“The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Hosanna in the highest!’*** Matthew 21:9, (NIV) and Luke records these words: ***“‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’”*** Luke 19:28 (NIV)

Psalm 118 is the last of a group of psalms which give praise to God by focusing on God’s acts of deliverance, especially delivering his people from slavery in Egypt. This becomes a starting point to speak of the deliverance God will bring through the work of the Messiah. The annual Passover celebration, just beginning on this day, was one of the times that this Psalm was heard.

The people were welcoming him as coming ***“in the name of the Lord”***. They were recognizing him as the Son of David. People knew their history – they knew the Scriptures. They had heard them read and repeated each year especially at Passover and they had memorized Scriptures. They believed the Kingdom of David was coming, but they may not have really understood what kind of kingdom it was.

When Luke writes ***“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*** Luke 19:38 (NIV) we are reminded of the words of the angels when Jesus was born!

This event was prophesied in these words from Zechariah: ***“Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”*** Zechariah 9:9 (NIV) Zechariah tells them this king comes for you, for your benefit. Matthew specifically tells us: ***“This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: ‘Say to the Daughter of Zion, “See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”’”*** Matthew 21:4-5 (NIV)

Matthew’s Gospel was written primarily for Jews, who knew the Old Testament, and so we read more of the Old Testament prophecies in Matthew. Other of the evangelists wrote more for Gentiles, who didn’t know all the Old Testament background. Yet the Gospel is for all men, Jew and Gentile alike. ***“It is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”*** Romans 1:16 (NIV)

Look at all the joyous ways that people greeted Jesus. Then think of how it is that we can praise Jesus.

“A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Hosanna in the highest!’ When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this?’ The crowds answered, ‘This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.’” Matthew 21:8-11. (NIV)

“Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, ‘Hosanna!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!’ ‘Hosanna in the highest!’” Mark 11:8-10 (NIV)

“As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!’” Luke 19:36-38 (NIV)

And in our sermon text we read: ***“They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting, ‘Hosanna!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Blessed is the King of Israel!’”***

Even before this time, palm branches had become a national symbol of Israel. This is one of the reasons they began to wave them and put them on the road in front of Jesus. Bible scholars have pointed out that it isn't just because the palm branches happened to be convenient and they are looking for anything they can use. The crowd is making a statement.

By riding the donkey into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives Jesus had all but hung a sign around his neck that said "I Am The Messiah." The people recognize the symbolism of Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem during the week of Passover. They see the fulfillment of Scripture and the symbolism of riding a donkey because he is the true "son of David" and they affirm it by taking up their part.

All the symbolism was not lost on the Jewish leaders. ***"So the Pharisees said to one another, 'See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!'"*** So their schemes and intentions and plans to get rid of Jesus went into high gear. We see their hatred for Jesus bubbling over when Matthew tells us ***"But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area, 'Hosanna to the Son of David,' they were indignant. 'Do you hear what these children are saying?' they asked him. 'Yes,' replied Jesus, 'have you never read, "'From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise'"*** Matthew 21:15-16 (NIV)

Although the people welcomed Jesus as a king on this day, it didn't last. Five days later they were ready to crucify him, led by their unbelieving religious leaders.

How fickle are humans! Yet all this was done for us. Even those who had been with him for about three years, listening and learning, didn't fully recognize what was happening. ***"At first his disciples did not understand all this. Only after Jesus was glorified did they realize that these things had been written about him and that they had done these things to him."***

So while we today welcome Jesus, too, with all these grand words, rejoicing because he comes as a king, how do we let him into our lives every other day?

May we welcome Jesus into our lives every day with such joyous words and thoughts so that we may acknowledge him for what he is. We celebrate by praising the king who redeems us. We celebrate by looking forward, looking beyond the sufferings and death, remembering the real reason for the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ. We look forward to his ultimate victory, his resurrection which we will celebrate one week from today! Amen.