

John 65 –The Triumphal Entry

10/19/2025

Scripture 1: (Jn. 12:12-19 ESV)

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!"

And Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey's colt!"

His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him. The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him."

Scripture 2: (Ps. 118:19-29 ESV)

Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success!

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.

The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us.

Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar! You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!

Scripture 3: (Zech. 9:9-11 ESV)

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and he shall speak peace to the nations; his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth. As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.

Sermon:

The evangelist John, now brings us to our first, familiar event in the Passion narrative of Jesus Christ; the narrative that will quickly culminate with His sacrificial death by crucifixion. This event, Jesus's Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem before His final Passover, is commonly called "Palm Sunday"; however, the day of the week on which it actually occurred is subject to debate. {The Feast of Passover always happens on the evening of the 14th of Nisan (Lev 23:5). The celebratory meal in Bethany happened six days prior, on the evening of the 8th of Nisan (John 12:1), and according to John, Jesus' Triumphal entry happened on the 9th of Nisan. If the Feast of Passover occurred on Thursday evening (Maundy Thursday), then the 8th would have been the Friday prior and their meal would have been the Sabbath meal. This would make "*the next day*" of John 12:12, the Sabbath and Saturday. This day would have been very inappropriate for the reported "parade", as being a violation of the Sabbath, but such a transgression is not recorded by any of the Gospels. If the Feast of Passover occurred on Friday evening, then the Bethany meal would have occurred on Saturday evening, to make "*the next day*" Sunday. But, that would have been very improbable since the preparations necessary for such a banquet would have needed to happen during the Sabbath day, and would have been a terrible Sabbath transgression (Exodus 35:3). Again, the timing matters.} Nevertheless, historical Church tradition encourages us to remember this event on the Lord's Day immediately prior to the principal, annual celebration of Christ's resurrection, since we celebrate Jesus's resurrection every Sunday. So, while the day of remembrance is unimportant, the fact of our remembrance is important and needful. {Recognizing and remembering it is in accord with the Regulative Principles of Worship because the event is recorded in Scripture and therefore, of benefit to the Church and since we do not consider "Palm Sunday" observation to be prescribed, but described. It is very reasonable to ensure the regular remembrance of a redemptive event recorded in all four Gospel accounts.}

This unique and extraordinary event is recorded by all four Gospel writers (Matt 21:4-9, Mark 11:7-10, Luke 19:35-38). Although each one chose to alternatively include, or exclude, certain peripheral details, such as Jesus sending some of the disciples ahead to acquire the donkey (Matthew 21:2), all four are in complete agreement concerning the important facts:

- Jesus entered Jerusalem to the acclamation of a Jewish crowd.
- The crowd welcomed Him shouting "*Hosanna!*", or "Save us!".
- The Jewish religious leadership was upset and concerned over this occurrence. And,
- This event was universally interpreted a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, "*Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*".

So now, "*The next day...*", the day after Mary anointed Jesus in Bethany, "*...the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem.*". The word was out and people were excited to hear that Jesus was on His way to celebrate the Feast of Passover in Jerusalem. Crowds of people, ordinary people, were so excited that they welcomed Jesus with a spontaneous parade, and "*...they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'*". But, what the crowds did not do, was betray Jesus to the religious authorities, as requested in John 11:57. They did not surround Jesus as an angry mob or try to capture Him, at this time. Instead, they welcomed Him as they should royalty, invoking the words of a royal Psalm: Psalm 118. They welcomed Jesus, and blessed Jesus as the rightful heir to King David's throne (2 Samuel 7:12-16).

Meanwhile, "*Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written.*". But, Jesus's choice of transportation was not only a fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, it was also a statement filled with political symbolism understandable by anyone paying attention.

- First, Jewish peasants walked, they did not ordinarily ride.
- Second, walking up and into Jerusalem was a devotional exercise for devout Jews. Normally, they would either say or sing the “Psalms of Assent” (Psalm 120-134) as they traveled to Jerusalem and as they were walking up into the Temple. This was an intentionally thoughtful spiritual practice and also not very conducive to riding.
- Third, even the religious leaders walked everywhere, so long as they were physically capable.
- Fourth, although a high ranking Roman officer might ride upon a horse, or in a chariot, surrounded by his soldiers, it was certainly expected that an ethnarch (local king), or Caesar himself, would ride rather than walk. Yet the carpenter Jesus, the Rabbi Jesus, entered Jerusalem riding as a king would. But, He rode humbly upon a donkey as a symbol of humility and peace not as part of war's panoply. Not only did Jesus ride a donkey, it was an unbroken and untrained colt; an unsuitable animal and likely dangerous to ride.
 - Jesus's Triumphal Entry was also an echo of Solomon's coronation as David's successor, “*So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites went down and had Solomon ride on King David's mule and brought him to Gihon. There Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the tent and anointed Solomon. Then they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, "Long live King Solomon!" And all the people went up after him, playing on pipes, and rejoicing with great joy, so that the earth was split by their noise.*” (1 Ki. 1:38-40 ESV). Solomon was led up from the Gihon Spring {a principal water source for Jerusalem; and the source for the water which flows through “Hezekiah's Tunnel”} into the city, on up to the Tabernacle of the LORD, as all the people of Jerusalem rejoiced with loud and glad voices.

Doing this, Jesus finally declared Himself openly. Jesus was claiming His right to David's throne and authority over all Israel, under God. Jesus was finally answering the Jews' request from John 10:24, when “*...the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly."*” (Jn. 10:24 ESV). Still, in the midst of all the tumult and excitement, “*His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him.*”. The disciples could not understand what was going on around them in that moment. They could not recognize history being made around them. They were too busy living in the moment. They were too focused on the world around them. But after Jesus' resurrection and ascension, when He was glorified by the Father and once they were filled by the Holy Spirit, they then remembered this day, and then, they were caused to understand (John 14:26).

Next, John explains why the crowd gathered and received Jesus in this manner, since the historical context has already explained where this crowd of people came from, as John had written, “*Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.*” (Jn. 11:55 ESV) The evangelist now explains that, “*The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness. The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign.*”. These devout Jews were welcoming Jesus, praising Jesus, and acclaiming Jesus because all the people who had witnessed His seventh Sign: His raising of Lazarus from the dead; believed it and were telling everyone about what Jesus had done. They saw Jesus and, they believed Jesus and, they believed in Jesus. Therefore, in their excitement, they enthusiastically invited others to “Come and see!”. They testified about what they had seen Jesus do. They understood that Jesus had done something new and extraordinary. They understood that Jesus was, somehow, different from the other Rabbis and rulers. They proclaimed their interpretation, that Jesus is the Son of God, the Son of Man, the Son of David and therefore, the only rightful King of Israel. They knew how they should respond to what they were believing.

As all of this joyful exuberance was going on, “...the Pharisees said to one another, ‘You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.’”. This response by the crowd was disheartening to the Pharisees and religious leadership. They were beginning to consider that all of their hard work: whether that might be considered “hard spiritual work to preserve holiness”, “hard good works of charity”, or their efforts to remove Jesus and His influence; was ineffective and all for naught. This public popularity of Jesus was causing them to despair and become even more desperate to preserve and defend the status quo.

Now, although the disciples did not understand the fullness of what was happening, or what it meant, the Pharisees and the chief priests (the influential men, who were most Torah educated and theologically astute) surely did. They were able to read between lines to recognize and understand the message that Jesus was sending and, they saw how the Jewish people (how God's people) were responding to His message. There were two questions that they understood the answers to and what they understood was the cause of their anger and fear.

- What exactly was the prophecy that Jesus was fulfilling? And,
- What were the people actually saying through their response?

Now ordinarily, during a Palm Sunday service, we only take the opportunity to emphasize the surface elements of this narrative. We focus on Jerusalem's joyous welcome of Jesus juxtaposed against the Jewish leadership's annoyance. We focus on Jesus's arrival as a king, and emphasize the humility implied by riding a donkey. However, we rarely take the time or the opportunity to dig into what it actually means because we are more focused on the event's place within the context of Jesus' Passion.

Zechariah, who prophesied about the donkey, was a prophet in Judea (contemporaneous with Haggai; Ezra 5:1, Zechariah 1:1) during the post-exilic reconstruction of Jerusalem and the original rebuilding of the Temple. He belonged to a priestly family from the tribe of Levi (Nehemiah 12:12-21). He prophesied while Zerubbabel (a descendant of David) was governor of Judea administering Judea under the authority of Darius, the Persian. This was a period when things were still troubled, but becoming hopeful. During his prophetic ministry, Zechariah experienced and recorded a series of heavenly visions: visions that provided much of the imagery found within the book of Revelation; and he proclaimed a lengthy prophesy about the Messiah: a future, coming King (Zech 9:9) who would oversee the restoration of God's people (Zechariah 10); who would be “pierced” (Zech 12:10) to cleanse them of sin and unrighteousness (Zech 13:1); whose followers would get scattered when He is struck down (Zech 13:7); but, who will also ultimately be avenged and vindicated by the LORD when He comes and establishes His Kingdom upon earth as in heaven (Zech 14:9), and pours living waters (Zech 14:8) out onto the whole world sanctifying it (Zech 14:20-21). Zechariah, chapter 9, is just the start of this very detailed and specific, lengthy prophecy. So, when John tells us that “...Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written”, we know that Jesus did this with particular and obvious intent. Jesus was sending a specific message, saying that He is Christ the King while proclaiming the character of His rule.

King Jesus “...will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the war horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off...”. King Jesus will be the King of Peace. He will end Israel's struggle with the world. All of their strivings, whether offensive or defensive, will be ended by Him unilaterally. God's Elect people will no longer need to fear the world and they shall no longer need to fight against it because, “...he shall speak peace to the nations...”. All conflicts shall cease at the word of His command. Everything will be restored to the unity and wholeness of the LORD's intention. King Jesus shall sovereignly reign upon the earth as Christ, the LORD.

King Jesus will speak and the world shall listen and obey because He is the Almighty King. His authority is absolute, omnipotent and omnipresent for “...his rule shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.”. Furthermore, King Jesus is not merely be King of Israel. His territory is not limited to the land between the River and the sea (from the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea) {the territory claimed by

Palestinian Muslims, without a valid ancient, historical claim}, nor is it limited to the territory promised by God to Abraham, when “...*the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."*” (Gen. 15:18-21 ESV) (from the Nile in Egypt, to the Euphrates in modern day Iraq). Jesus Christ is King from East to West, North to South. There is no place His authority and power does not reach, whether on earth or in heaven.

But why does this absolutely, universal sovereign, King Jesus come to establish such a peace? “*As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you...*”, He comes and He dies for us, for His chosen, Elect people: His brothers and sisters; because of the Covenant of Grace. Christ comes to us as our Savior King, because of God's promise to redeem a people for Himself, by grace alone (Exodus 6:6); a people to be kept and preserved as His treasured possession (Exodus 19:5). King Jesus comes to us because God our Father has given us to God the Son (John 6:39), and He will allow nothing to come between us or steal us away from Him (John 10:29). Therefore, King Jesus comes to set the “...*prisoners free from the waterless pit.*”; to free prisoners of sinfulness and release us from our bondage to sin and Satan; to redeem us from the fires of that hell we justly deserve, and let us drink from the waters of eternal life (John 4:10, 7:38) instead.

His disciples could not imagine that Jesus riding upon a donkey would say so much, but the Pharisees and priests heard His claim, loud and clear. Meanwhile, like the disciples, the people in the crowd could not understand the fullness of what was going on, but still, they recognized this event as a messianic fulfillment, as evidenced by their cries of acclamation.

Their shouts were much more than just “hip, hip, hooray!” or “for He's a jolly good fellow!”. They were clear. They were specific. They were filled with biblical meaning and their use was very intentional. All four Gospels record the crowd shouting “Hosanna!”, a word transliterated from Hebrew, mediated through Greek, into modern English and a direct quotation from Psalm 118. Psalm 118:25 reads in Hebrew, *an'na Adonai/YHVH hoshey'ah n'na* <**an/na adonai hoshey/ah na**>, which simply translates as “We beseech you, LORD. Save us, we pray!”. The root of Hosanna is the word *yasha'*, the same root as for Joshua/Yeshua and Jesus/Yesu, which means “to save” or “to deliver” and rescue. This form of the word is used mostly in the Psalms (Psalm 12:2, 20:10, 28:9, 44:4, 60:7, 98:1, 108:7, 118:25) (the two exceptions are Judges 7:2 and 2 Kings 6:26) and always in the sense of asking the LORD for divine deliverance.

Now Psalm 118 can be divided into three sections {as a narrative chiasm}. It begins as a psalm of praise and thanksgiving to God for His past help and good providence. Then it moves into a plea for help and a declaration of confident trust that the LORD will once again deliver His chosen people. Finally, it concludes with a faithful response of worship, praise, and glorification for all of the LORD's works of salvation. It is from this third part that the “Hosanna” which the crowd shouted came. But, “Hosanna” is not the only clue which links the crowd's response to Psalm 118. It is its combination with “*Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord*”, that solidifies the connection; a paired expression found only there.

This third portion of Psalm 118 begins with, “*Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation.*”. When this psalm was written, and throughout the history of Israel, “*the gates of righteousness*” would have been understood as the outer entrance to the Tabernacle or Temple, since a person had to enter through them in order to come to the altar to offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to the LORD. Meanwhile, while sacrifices were offered and presented to the priests just outside of the entrance, and then, after the sacrifice of atonement was made and, after a person was purified and they were justified as righteous, only then was a person allowed to enter through the gate to worship.

Then next, the psalmist declared, “*The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is the*

LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”, reminding us that our salvation entirely depends upon the LORD: on His wisdom and His providence; from beginning to end. God's choice, His chosen cornerstone, is the key for our only firm foundation. God chose Abraham. God chose Moses. God chose David. God chose Jesus Christ. Since the LORD has done all this, *“This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.”*, therefore, we should offer Him praise and thanksgiving for everything.

Both of these elements from the psalmist are applied to Jesus Christ, as the *Logos* who is *Theos* and *Andros*. While the *“gates of righteousness”* are representative of the entrance into the Jerusalem Temple, Jesus is the spiritual gate into the heavenly Temple through which we must pass (Hebrews 9:11-12); the curtain torn which opens the way to the Father (Matt 27:51; Hebrews 10:19-22). Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice that make us righteous, so that we may enter the heavenly Temple (Hebrews 9:13-15). Jesus is the *“cornerstone”* (Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:6-8) upon whom the Prophets and Apostles built and laid the foundation of our faith, into which we are joined and built upon as the Church of God (Ephesians 2:19-22).

Now we come to the crowd's plea, *“Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.”* and *“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”*. We can obviously see how this applies to Jesus. The Jerusalem crowd called out for deliverance from the LORD, a deliverance to be wrought through Jesus as the LORD's recognized representative: as the Christ of God, as the Messiah. They were praying for God's help. They blessed Christ and praised Him as coming *“in the name of the LORD”*. They offered and promised Jesus the throne of Israel in return for bringing them deliverance. Their cries were religious. Their cries were political and nationalistic. Their cries were also anti-establishmentarian, against both the Temple rulers and against Roman authority. Matthew tells us that this triumphal procession moved through the city, right up into the Temple itself (Matt 21:9-16), symbolic of the union between earthly and spiritual power invested in Israel's king (as the Hasmoneans had unjustly assumed and claimed for themselves).

Finally, after the psalmist's prayer for the LORD's salvation, he proclaims God's work of grace, *“The LORD is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us.”* and declares what our rightful response should be, *“Bind the festal sacrifice with cords, up to the horns of the altar!”*. We are to offer God sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. We are to confess Him publicly as our God, our Savior, and to glorify Him by telling about all His wonders, saying *“You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God; I will extol you. Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!”*. We are to thank Him for His goodness and remember His covenant faithfulness, His steadfastness, the certain surety of His promises, and His eternal and boundless love for His chosen children.

The psalmist's conclusion also applies through Christ. Jesus is the *“light of the world”* (John 8:12), the *Theos* who is the *Phos*. Jesus is our festal sacrifice bound to the horns of the altar, on the cross. Jesus is our atonement, given by God's grace, out of His love and in covenant fidelity. But, while this last element was implied by the crowd's acclamation, they could not know or understand the truth of how it would be fulfilled, yet.

Finally, Jesus's *“Triumphal Entry”* was more than just a socially provocative event, it was a deliberate move in God's plan of redemption. It was the beginning of the end for Satan's claim upon the world. It was the start of Christ's reign upon the earth. One might even argue that it was the beginning of the *“end of the age”* (Matthew 28:28) and the start of the *“end times”*. {Alternatively, I could also argue that they began with Jesus' death on the cross, or His resurrection, or even His ascension. But, I could also argue Jesus's baptism by John or with His birth. Yet, whatever moment we chose to consider, what matters most is that we understand that, while we are living in the *“end times”*, there probably will not be an extra dramatic *“End Times”* (ala *Left Behind* or Hal Lindsey).} We are now in the *“end times”* and the *“last days”*, and we shall be until Jesus Christ returns to consummate the Kingdom that was publicly inaugurated on that *“Palm Sunday”*.

So, what should we learn from this deeper look into Jesus's *“Triumphal Entry”* into Jerusalem before the

Passover?

We should remember that there are great similarities between the Jews of 1st Century Jerusalem and self-identified Christians of every era. Like them, we are quick to (verbally) welcome Jesus into our lives. Like them, we are quick to proclaim our allegiance to Christ. Like them, we are quick to shout our praise for Him. But, also like them, once the reality of Jesus fails to match our expectations, wishes, or wants we are just as quick to abandon Him.

We become quick to abandon faithfulness and obedience to our accepted king for the imaginary, limitless possibilities of self-rule. We prefer to worship in the temple built by our own choices: our chosen cornerstone, laid upon a foundation of sand under a structure built of wood and other perishable materials, washed in white. We prefer to enter our temple as we are, resisting any effort to change, because we are going in to worship the god whom we have fashioned in our own image.

Unless you are regenerate. Unless God the Holy Spirit has changed your heart and brought your soul to new life. Unless the Spirit is conforming you, transforming you, to become more and more like Christ. Unless Jesus lives within your heart as the Lord of your life, as your personal Savior, and as your one true King. Then, when Christ comes into your life, you will welcome Him truly, crying out “Hosanna!” in earnest. Then you will truly bless Him and you will give fervent thanks to God for His steadfast love.

“Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!”

AMEN