

Palm Sunday
April 10, 2022

Our Savior's Way Lutheran Church

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This is the day the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it.

In the ancient world, kings often rode into their cities in golden chariots that were drawn by the best horses of their kingdoms. As they proceeded through the streets of the cities, cheering crowds often greeted them. Their destination was usually a plush palace where scores of servants served them. Such a ride of glory is one that we can all understand and probably envy.

This is how the situation appeared for Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary, as he, and his wife, Sophie, rode through the streets of Sarajevo, the capital city of Bosnia, on June 28, 1914. He and his wife were riding in an Austrian-built Graef und Stift touring car. It was a convertible and it was red. Today, we would call it elegant and sporty. It was fit for a king. The crowds along the boulevard that the Archduke and his wife traveled cheered as the motorcade passed by. But, in this case, the Archduke and his wife were not going to a grand palace. The Archduke was riding to his death at the hands of an assassin's gun. The trigger that killed the Archduke and his wife, Sophie, and triggered the horrors of World War I and the deaths of 20 million people. It was a similar situation for Jesus. Jesus was hailed as a king, too, and He was also traveling to His death, not at the hands of an assassin, but on the cross.

Palm Sunday is all about our king. It is all about glory, laud, and honor. It is about the recognition of who Jesus is. Do you remember the title of George Frederick Handel's great oratorio? We always hear it at Christmas time. (The Messiah) It is about Jesus. Strangely, we do not hear it sung at this time – on Palm Sunday. It is on Palm Sunday when Jesus is acknowledged as The Messiah. He is the one who is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is royalty.

The timing of this Palm Sunday event was clearly important. The city of Jerusalem with the Temple was the host to the great celebrations of the Jewish people. They came as commanded by God in Leviticus 23. God told Moses in v. 2, ***“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘These are the appointed feasts of the Lord that you shall proclaim as holy convocations; they are my appointed feasts.’”*** The first of this convocation was always to celebrate the Sabbath – the 7th day. The second was the next most important it was *“The Passover.”* The Passover celebrated salvation of God's chosen people from slavery in Egypt and their subsequent settlement in the Promised Land. It was always celebrated on the 14th day of Nisan, the 1st month of the Hebrew calendar, beginning at twilight. All Jewish men from all over the world were expected to come to the Temple in Jerusalem at least three times each year to celebrate the Feast of the Passover along with the Feast of Shavuot (which we call Pentecost) and the Feast of the Tabernacles. Thousands and thousands of people flooded the roads to Jerusalem and the city itself. According to Alfred Edersheim, a Jewish Biblical scholar who converted to Christianity, Jerusalem covered about 300 acres and normally numbered 200,000 – 250,000 inhabitants. During the feasts such as Passover,

he estimated that the population grew to as high as three million people. The city of Jerusalem could not accommodate all the pilgrims who came, so they camped on the outskirts of the city in specific and traditional areas. History tells us that the Galileans traditionally camped on the south edge of the mountain called the Mount of Olives. Jesus was traveling from Bethany to Jerusalem, about a two-mile journey, and passed through their encampment. These people were the ones with which Jesus had spent most of His life and ministry. They knew Him the best. They were agrarian people, shepherds, and fishermen. They hated the Roman occupiers and their Herodian puppets. They want to overthrow them and Jesus was their champion for doing so. It was with these people Jesus had been teaching and healing. He was highly respected and revered by them.

On the way, Jesus performed a stunning miracle in Bethany when He brought His friend Lazarus to life after he had been dead for four days. This raised the fever pitch among the pilgrimage crowds even higher. They, not only got to see Jesus but also Lazarus whom He had restored to life. Jesus was traveling with a huge entourage of people. The Galileans already believed Jesus was the Messiah, the savior. As they walked up the road from Jericho to Jerusalem a steep climb of 3,750 feet, they sang psalms 120 – 134, also known as the Psalms of the Ascent because the people were making this steep climb.

They cut palm branches and waved them to signify that St. John does not talk as much about Jesus' choice of transportation in his Gospel. Most people in Palestine walked wherever they went. Jesus needed no special transportation in His divinity and this is the only time

recorded in the Bible that Jesus did not walk. From the other Gospel writers, we learn that Jesus sent two of His disciples to procure the donkey and her colt, an animal that had never been ridden. Jesus was purposeful in doing this. He fulfilled a prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9: ***“Fear not, daughter of Zion, Behold your king is coming sitting on a donkey’s colt.”*** Jesus made His triumphant entry while riding a lowly animal which was a symbol of peace. When horses are mentioned in the Bible, they are almost always in relation to kings and war. Donkeys are mentioned in relation to common people. And, in the ancient Biblical world, a leader rode on a horse if he was coming into war and a donkey to signify peace. Jesus used the donkey to connect with the common people. Life was also not easy for a Jew living under Roman rule in the 1st century—more so for the poor. But Jesus embraced the poor and sick people during His time here on earth. His choice of a donkey, instead of a horse, was God’s way of saying that He came as a king who will serve and save the oppressed. If we look at the Old Testament, the great kings of the Golden Age of Israel, King David, and King Solomon, both rode donkeys. King David rode two donkeys according to 2 Samuel 16: 1-2 at the Mount of Olives, the same place that Jesus was passing in this event, as He was going into exile. King Solomon, the son of David, was crowned King of Israel while seated on his father’s donkey according to 1 Kings 1: 32-35.

It was not a coincidence that Jesus rode on a donkey. It was a statement and the people who saw Jesus as their Messiah and King recognized it. It is even more interesting that the Hebrew words for the mother donkey *“athown”* derived from the Hebrew words *“ethan”* and *“eythan”*

which means *“to continue, chieftan, mighty, hard, strength and strong.”* These are the words used for a leader and a king. The word for a male donkey colt is *“chamor”* coming from the Hebrew root word *“chamar.”* *“Chamar”* means *“foul, being red and trouble.”* Jesus was a king and He was heading into a week full of troubles in which the color red would be most evident as Jesus shed His blood as the Lamb of God.

Getting back to timing. According to the prophecy found in the Book of Daniel, Chapter 9:24-26, one of the most controversial prophecies in the Bible, Jesus was right on time. The prophetic words found in this Old Testament reading indicated that Jesus would come to Jerusalem in 173,880 days. Jesus entered Jerusalem seven days before the Passover on April 6th in 33 A.D., 173,880 days from the date announced in Daniel. This was the 10th day of Nisan in the Hebrew calendar. This date was significant in the Old Testament, for another reason. According to Joshua 4:19, this was the day on which Joshua and the Children of Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land in a repeat of the miracle at the Red Sea.

The 10th day of Nisan, the first month, was important in April of 33 A.D. for another reason. A census at the Temple revealed that 25,000 lambs were sacrificed at the Passover that year. God had clearly declared that the Passover lambs were to be a year old and without blemish (Exodus 12.) The lambs were brought in and inspected for four days to make sure they met the unblemished criteria. This day, the 10th of Nisan, was lamb selection day. This day, the 10th of Nisan, was the day that Jesus rode into the city of Jerusalem. Jesus probably entered through the eastern wall of the city, north of the Temple. If so, He passed

through a gate, called the Sheep's Gate. It was the gate used by worshippers to bring in sheep for sacrifice because it was closest to the Temple. Jesus entered with the Passover lambs. Jesus was the Lamb of God, as John had declared after he had baptized Jesus.

The Galilean pilgrims were probably the ones who put their coats on the road and waved the palm branches. Both of these actions pointed back to a king, they signified a king. At the Old Testament coronation of King Jehu, coats were placed down for him to walk on according to 2 Kings 9:13. Palms branches were cut from trees and waved for Jesus. This practice dated back to Leviticus 23:40 when God directed that palm branches be cut and used in the celebration of the Feast of Booths. The Galilean Jews knew these facts and applied them to their King, Jesus. It was also significant that at this time, palm branches symbolized hope for a new nation of Israel independent of foreign domination. Jesus represented that hope as the "*Messiah*" and potentially a new King.

The cheering crowds shouted words from Psalm 118 verses 25 and 26. The first was prefaced with the Hebrew word Hosanna which is loosely translated as "*save now*" or "*give salvation now.*" This word was commonly used as praise to God at the feasts of the Tabernacles, Dedication, and Passover. The people were calling on Jesus as their Messiah and their savior. The words of verse 26 called a blessing on the "*one,*" in other words the Messiah, "*who comes in the name of the Lord.*" The words, "*Indeed the King of Israel*" are not part of that verse but were added by the people indicating they saw Jesus as their king.

This event was so important that it is one of only ten events in the life and ministry of Jesus that are common to all four Gospels. It was so extraordinary and striking that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all recorded it. When we compare all four of these accounts, we learn why this was such an important event not only for the people of Jesus' day but for all Christians throughout time. Christians like Alfred Edersheim and Christians like you and me. Jesus is our King. He was the Messiah, but he was not a temporal king. He was a heavenly King with a divine mission – salvation. Not temporal salvation, but spiritual salvation. Not for an earthly period of time, but for eternity. Not just for the people of His time, but for the people of all time. In Psalm 118, David writes: ***“I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. The stone that builders rejected has become the corner stone. This is the day the Lord has made let us be glad and rejoice in it.”*** Today is a glorious day but it points forward to another day that is glorious in a far different way.

Not all of the people who witnessed Jesus in His triumphal entry supported Him as the Messiah and the savior. The Pharisees and other religious leaders were jealous and frustrated at His popularity. They were even prophetic in saying that it seemed *“the whole world,”* in their opinion, believed Jesus to be the Messiah. It didn't at that time, but it would come to be later. They knew they had to eliminate Him, and Lazarus, to stop Him. And frustrated and jealous of Jesus, they set out to do so. The Triumphal Entry points to the events for the next days of this coming Holy Week.

Today, though, we rejoice with the crowds as Jesus makes His triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. He comes today, on Palm Sunday as a King. In five days He will be mocked as a

king with a crown of thorns and a scarlet cape. In five days, He will die as our servant and substitute and will be nailed on His cross and mocked as the *“King of the Jews.”* And though He knew exactly what was going to happen – a humiliating arrest, three trials, and death via crucifixion, He willingly rode on out of servant love for you. All the horror that awaited Him, He willingly embraced out of compassion for you and me.

He came in glory not to a grand palace, but in obedience to God to a cross and death as He offered Himself in judgment, accepting the wrath of God for our sinfulness. In doing so, He died in disgrace and shame like a common criminal. David wrote in Psalm 118: ***“This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”*** And so it is. In His name and to His glory, laud, and honor. Amen.