

Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem

Printed Text • Matthew 21:1-11

Devotional Reading • 1 Corinthians 11:27-32

Aim for Change

By the end of this lesson, we will STUDY the immediate response of the crowds to Jesus' arrival into Jerusalem, IDENTIFY reasons people today seek and follow new leadership, and ACCEPT Jesus as a leader who offers hope for the world in every age.

In Focus

The Hills family always attended church with Nana Rochelle on Easter Sunday before going to her house for dinner. When Nana died, none of her children felt they could be the host to continue this tradition. Nana's granddaughter Marie didn't like this, but she felt there was nothing she could do since she was fresh out of graduate school.

A few years later, Marie and her husband Gene bought a house. As she was shopping for decorations for their new home, the spring lilies, chicks, and bunnies made her remember Nana. When Marie got home, her husband's eyes grew wide when he saw all she had purchased. Marie, however, was grinning ear-to-ear as she hauled in more bags.

"Remember when Pastor Wayne talked about making new family traditions?" Marie asked. "This is an old tradition, but I'm bringing it back. We're going to host Easter dinner."

By the time Marie and Gene put the last of the dishes away, she realized the fun part was over. She had to get her family on board. Marie knew it wouldn't be easy to convince everyone, so she prayed God would soften their hearts in advance. She didn't want to come off too uppity, telling people they had to come over. Instead, she went to visit each family unit and encouraged them to keep Nana's legacy alive.

On Easter Sunday, Marie beamed when her family filled three whole pews. That evening, as the family gathered around the table for dinner, Marie gave thanks to Jesus. She was grateful that Nana Rochelle's legacy of love for God and family would live on.

What family traditions can you create or restart to remember Jesus' sacrifice for your salvation?

Keep In Mind

Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass." (Matthew 21:5, KJV)

Words You Should Know

A. Hosanna (Matthew 21:9) hosanna (Gk./ Heb.) – "Save now," or "Save, we beseech Thee"

B. Blessed (v. 9) makarios (Gk.) – Fortunate, happy, spoken well of

Say It Correctly

Bethphage. BETH-fage

Salome. SAH-low-may

Ahijah. ah-HEE-Juh

KJV

Matthew 21:1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,
2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.
3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.
4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,
5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.
6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,
7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.
8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.
9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.
10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?
11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

NLT

Matthew 21:1 As Jesus and the disciples approached Jerusalem, they came to the town of Bethphage on the Mount of Olives. Jesus sent two of them on ahead.
2 "Go into the village over there," he said. "As soon as you enter it, you will see a donkey tied there, with its colt beside it. Untie them and bring them to me.
3 If anyone asks what you are doing, just say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will immediately let you take them."
4 This took place to fulfill the prophecy that said,
5 "Tell the people of Jerusalem,
 'Look, your King is coming to you.
 He is humble, riding on a donkey—
 riding on a donkey's colt.'"
6 The two disciples did as Jesus commanded.
7 They brought the donkey and the colt to him and threw their garments over the colt, and he sat on it.
8 Most of the crowd spread their garments on the road ahead of him, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting,
"Praise God for the Son of David!
 Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
 Praise God in highest heaven!"
10 The entire city of Jerusalem was in an uproar as he entered. "Who is this?" they asked.
11 And the crowds replied, "It's Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

The People, Places, and Times

Messiah. The word “anointed one” in Hebrew is the title *meshiach* or “Messiah,” or in Greek *Christos* or “Christ.” Since apostolic times, the name Christ has become the proper title of Jesus, whom Christians recognize as the God-given Redeemer of Israel and the Church’s Lord. “Christ,” or Messiah, is therefore a name admirably suited to express both the Church’s link with Israel through the Old Testament and the faith that sees the worldwide scope of the salvation in Him. The Jewish Messiah was expected to be a warrior-prince who would expel the hated Romans from Israel and bring in a kingdom in which the Jews would be promoted to world dominion. However, some of the messianic prophecies showed Him as more of a priest. The alternation between a kingly Messiah and a priestly figure is characteristic of the two centuries of early Judaism prior to the coming of Jesus.

What symbols does being an anointed king or an anointed priest carry?

Background

The significance of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem was such that all four Gospel writers make records of it. As it was time for the Passover, over two million Jewish inhabitants of the land made the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast and celebration. One could speculate this was the most excellent moment for the Messiah to make Himself known to so many of His people at one time. The symbolic focus of sacrifice was before them, and He would present Himself as the ultimate sacrifice.

Matthew’s Gospel records includes 41 prophetic quotes from the Old Testament which confirm Jesus as the Messiah. The people had seen others who professed to be the messiah, the conqueror of the land, the warrior set to overthrow the ruling government. They were all too familiar with processions of great war- horses and armies entering cities. They did not, however, expect such a humble entrance of a King riding on an animal that was a symbol of quietness, humility, and goodwill.

Still, they knew this was the Messiah and gave Him a king’s welcome, replete with an unriden colt, a carpet of garments off their backs, a pathway of palm leaves, and shouts of praise which rang out into the streets. Throngs of people, already gathering in the city, turned their attention to the King.

Jesus, ushered in as a King, knew this was the end of His earthly life and the beginning of His eternal reign. Jesus, regarded as an agitator, faced the hostile religious leaders, knowing that before the festival was ended, His blood would be on their hands. Jesus entered the town of His trial assured of His triumph!

Why are the crowds of Jerusalem so enthusiastic about Jesus now, but eager for His death a week later?

At-A-Glance

1. Presence of the Prophet (Matthew 21:1–7)
2. Procession of the People (vv. 8–11)

In Depth

1. Presence of the Prophet (Matthew 21:1–7)

Jesus sent two disciples to secure a donkey to ride into Jerusalem, in order to fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah. It is possible that Jesus made arrangements beforehand to have a donkey and her colt ready for His use, but it is also possible that only His reputation preceded Him. When the owner of the donkey and the colt learned that Jesus requested them, he gave them freely.

What is most significant is that Jesus chose a humble animal to ride into the city, not a mighty war-horse with sinewy muscles of great mass and strength leading a procession of highly trained warriors armed with breastplates of brass and plans for battle. Jesus rode on a colt, a symbol of humility, which made His entry and crucifixion forever memorable. But the presence of a King on a colt did not keep the people from praising Him. They perceived the prophet among them, and greeted Him as a King.

What do you do in your life to show humility?

2. Procession of the People (vv. 8–11)

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the crowd threw down their coats and branches along the road, and shouted praises to Him. Their actions honored Him, and they greeted Jesus with shouts and songs of the hallel psalms (Psalm 118:26) that were customary greetings to people journeying to Jerusalem for the Passover. However, the people knew Jesus was much more than just another traveler. They were honoring Him for the miracles they had seen Him perform.

The throngs of people, the furor that the Messiah had come, and the deafening shouts of praise created a momentum in the city that could be seen, felt, and heard. Leading the procession were children, not soldiers, who sang His praises and shouted His glory. Jesus is proclaimed as the “Son of David,” the rightful ruler of Israel and fulfillment of God’s ancient covenant with David. They welcome Him as coming “in the name of the Lord,” with the Lord God’s full power and authority.

The people of Jerusalem were excited and asked about Jesus’ identity. Most of Jesus’ ministry had been done outside of Jerusalem to avoid agitating the Jewish leaders. But now these same people, to whom He had ministered, were leading the procession into the city, and the city dwellers wanted to know about this King who sat on a colt and not on a throne. The crowd replied that He was the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee. Even though Galilee was out of the way, and Nazareth was such a small town, the crowd did not mind making it known that such a great prophet came from obscurity.

As Jerusalem prepared for the solemn remembrance of Passover, Jesus’ entrance whipped the people into a joyous frenzy. How do you respond to an unexpected leading of the Spirit during worship?

Search the Scriptures

1. What did the people say and do as Jesus entered Jerusalem?
2. What was the significance of their words and actions (vv. 8–9)?
3. What was the difference between the people of Jerusalem and the multitude who went before and after Jesus (vv. 10–11)?

Discuss the Meaning

Jesus tried to instill in His disciples' minds the prospect that the road to His future glory was bound to the Cross, with its experience of rejection, suffering, and humiliation. Only after the Resurrection were the disciples in a position to see what true messiahship meant (see Luke 24:45-46). The national title Messiah then took on a broader connotation, involving a kingly role which was to embrace all peoples (Luke 24:46-47). One indication of this is the fact that the early followers of the Messiah called themselves "Christians," Christ's people (Acts 11:26; 1 Peter 4:16), as a sign of their universal faith in a sovereign Lord.

In fulfilling His mission, Jesus was careful to look and act differently from others professing to be the messiah. What were these characteristics, and which, if any, should Christians imitate?

Liberating Lesson

People today have heard stories of ridiculous or outrageous demands celebrities feel entitled to make. They have seen important people being honored with a parade. While the presence of an important person seems to automatically draw a big crowd, you may have tried to gather a group together for an important cause, but only had a handful of people show up. All these things make leaders seem distant and unapproachable.

Thankfully, Christians' leader is unlike any other. Jesus is both the King of all humanity and a humble servant leader. Jesus is far more important than any celebrity living today, tomorrow, or yesterday, and yet He does not let His prestige block us from approaching Him. As we follow His example, we do not need to first acquire all the shiny bling of fame to have the platform to get His message out. We are free to simply be ourselves and humbly serve one another.

Application for Activation

As a class devise a few short campaign slogans that communicate why Jesus is the ideal king for all people everywhere. This week use the humor and cheesiness of these slogans as a comedic entry point to explain the importance of Jesus' revelation of Himself on Palm Sunday to your friends, neighbors, and coworkers.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

Matthew 21:1–11

The Triumphal Entry is told in each of the Gospel accounts (Mark 11:1–10; Luke 19:29–38; John 12:12–19), but each includes different details and emphases. The Gospel of Matthew is plentifully endowed with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. More prophets are quoted in Matthew than in Mark, Luke, and John combined. Matthew's writing style is also marked by his emphasis on the teaching ministry of Jesus.

To understand this text, consider the context. Immediately before entering Jerusalem, Jesus informs His disciples that He would be going to Jerusalem where the chief priest and scribes would mock, whip, and ultimately sentence Him to death. Jesus assures His disciples, however, that God would raise Him to life on the third day (Matthew 20:18-19). While Jesus is sharing this grave news, Salome, the wife of Zebedee and mother of two of the disciples, James and John, is so preoccupied with her sons' successes that she misses, or ignores, the gravity of the inhumane intent of Jesus' enemies. Though there is evidence (Matthew 20:17) that Jesus and company were in motion, talking and walking away from Judea and going to Jerusalem, Jesus hears, questions, and answers Salome. He settles the indignation of the 10 other disciples, a common reaction among the disciples toward women (Matthew 26:8) and children (Matthew 19:14). He also opened the eyes of two blind men sitting by the Jericho roadside.

From this context, today's text emerges. Jesus has expressed the purpose of their departure from Judea (Matthew 19:1). Their destination is Jerusalem and a place frequented by Jesus, the Mount of Olives (Matthew 21:1).

1 And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples,

The Mount of Olives is the place where Jesus agonizes and is betrayed, the place where He ascended into heaven, and also the supposed place of His second advent (Acts 1:9–12). The Mount of Olives is mentioned often in each Gospel (Matthew 24:3; Mark 11:1; Luke 19:37; John 8:1), as Jesus and His disciples frequently passed by it. Heading east out from Jerusalem, one goes down into a valley, and up on the next hill over is called the Mount of Olives. An olive grove stands there to this day, with some of its trees being old enough to have been seen on that very day of the Triumphal Entry long ago.

Notice a common pattern in the number of disciples Jesus sent. In the Bible the number two is often given in an "either/or" way: two gates, two great lights, two eternal places, two masters, two debtors, two sons, etc. In these incidences, the Bible is teaching how to make choices by comparison. The number two is also given in a "both/and" way: Jesus sends two of His disciples to visit John the Baptist while he is imprisoned (Matthew 11:2); Jesus sends forth the disciples by two's and gives them power over unclean spirits (Mark 6:7); Jesus sends the 70 by twos into every city and place where Jesus would come (Luke 10:1) and Jesus walks with two on the Emmaus Road (Luke 24:13). In these references, as well as in the current text, Jesus alludes to camaraderie.

2 Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me.

3 And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them.

The village “over against” refers to a place on the opposite side of a valley from you. Since Jesus and the disciples are on the Mount of Olives, the city of Jerusalem and its suburbs are all “over against” them. They are told they will find these animals “straightway,” just as soon as they reach the city.

If the two disciples are questioned about fulfilling His command, Jesus instructs the disciples to use words of urgency. Jesus takes no chances of offending the owner of the animals as He prepares for His triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Jesus is confident the owner will respond positively to His need.

The disciples are instructed to say, “The Lord has need of them.” How much do we, as believers, trust God to supply our every need? Hopefully, we can answer confidently by quoting Philippians 4:19, “But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”

The grammar of Matthew’s Gospel is not clear whether Jesus is assuring the disciples that “straightway” the owner of the animals will send them with the disciples, or if “straightway” Jesus will send the animals back to their owner. The Greek word *eutheos* (ew-THEH-ocē) means at once. If it is the quick action of the owner, culturally speaking, in the words of Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr., Jesus expects the owner to send the animals “right now.” If it is that the owner will get the animals back right away, it is another example of how God takes care of future consideration even before we can worry about it.

4 All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying,

5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.

This is a frequent refrain throughout Matthew’s Gospel. More than any other Gospel writer, Matthew is concerned with explaining how Jesus fulfilled all the messianic prophecies the Jews were expecting. Because of this, many scholars assume Matthew expects that his primary audience will be Jewish.

Behold (Gk. *idou*, ee-DOO) is a kind of interjection in Greek and draws attention to the subject “King” and the beginning of the long awaited day of liberation for God’s people. The context of this prophecy originally spoken by Zechariah is that God is coming into Jerusalem to proclaim peace over the Israelites’ perpetual enemies of the Philistines and Phoenicians (Zechariah 9:9). He further promises battle and victory against the Greeks. God as the returning King promises to break the bow and remove the chariot, because His people will need them no more. Prisoners will be freed from their dark dungeons. God’s dominion will stretch from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates and down to the Red Sea, and to the ends of the world.

Though the King is arriving, He comes meekly. Historically, a king arrives with a legion of bodyguards, officers, property, housing, pomp, and circumstance. Instead of arriving on a beast of burden, kings approach their subjects in chariots carried by the palace entourage. Jesus, however, comes without a horde of attendants surrounding Him; He comes meekly and sitting on an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass, or beast of burden.

Matthew mentions both a donkey and her colt, even though the other Gospel writers only mention the donkey. Other Gospel writers simply record this particular happening. Matthew offers no explanation of why Jesus needed both animals, or of how He used both. Perhaps He only rode the donkey and the colt simply followed behind its mother. Perhaps He rode one for a section of the road, then switched to the other. Matthew mentions this detail likely to make sure his audience fully appreciates the

fulfillment of Zechariah. The exact use of the colt, then, is not important. What is important is that Jesus is the fulfillment of prophecy.

6 And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them,

7 And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set him thereon.

It is not specified which two disciples went for the animals. Whoever the two disciples were, they acted to do as the Lord commanded. Obedience is an important characteristic in the life of God's children. Hopefully, God can count on us to follow His instructions just as directly as these disciples did, even when we don't understand why such a task is needed.

Matthew describes the coming of the Christ in all meekness and mercy to effect salvation, not in His might and majesty. It was the opposite of envy, enterprise, and arrogance; Zion's King enters Jerusalem outwardly impoverished, representing the life of Zion's humble citizens. Indeed, Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem can be compared with His birth. His nursery was borrowed, humble, and meager. Likewise, His triumphant entrance was on a borrowed means of transportation, humble and meager.

Reading about the disciples putting their clothes on the animals is reminiscent of Jesus' earlier instruction to the disciples about sharing even the clothes off their backs (Matthew 5:40; Luke 6:29). There Jesus emphasized the importance of freely giving up your cloak should anyone sue you for your coat. Jesus downplays worrying about clothing, among other things (Matthew 6:28). Apparently the disciples have learned and accepted this lesson because they spread their clothes on the animals and set Jesus on it. The Greek word here (himation, hee- MAH-tee-on) refers to the words cloak, garment, clothes, raiment, robe, apparel, vesture, and coats interchangeably. Therefore, it is possible the disciples spread an array of clothing.

8 And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way.

This was the week of Passover. Jerusalem and surrounding regions were crowded with travelers from the diaspora. The law required this migration on a number of occasions. Again, note the connection with Christ's birth. Joseph and Mary were traveling to Bethlehem to register for the census. Bethlehem was so crowded that all of the lodging places were filled. "No room in the inn" was common during the festivals, also called feasts (particularly during the Feast of Passover, Pentecost, and the Day of Atonement). During the Feast of Passover then, a "very great multitude" was available to spread their clothes and to cut down branches from the trees. The branches allowed a softer and gentler ride against the uneven, stony, dirt roadway for the King of the Jews. Mark does give us a hint to these leafy branches, which John specifically identifies as palm trees (John 12:13). The disciples and people of Jerusalem do not have an expensive red carpet to roll out for Jesus, but they provide the honor they can with their clothes and palms making a humble parade for a humble King.

9 And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest.

For centuries, God's people awaited the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of the perfect King who would reign over His people. He was coming to establish a kingdom with laws written on the heart, a kingdom of love, joy, and peace. Psalms 45 and 110 give the promise of a Messiah yet to come. Daniel verbalizes his vision of one who is given dominion, glory, and a kingdom in which all

would serve (7:13– 14). Matthew and Luke magnify the King in His earthly ministry. Remembering these prophecies, the crowd proclaims Jesus as King during His triumphal entry during the feast of Passover, later to be called Palm Sunday.

“Hosanna” is the greeting used by the gathered community of faith on the occasion of Jesus’ triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. From Psalm 118:25–26, the Hebrew word for this greeting is most closely translated as the following prayer: “Save now,” or “Save, we beseech Thee.” It should be noted at this point that the annual festival, called Passover, commemorated the final plague on Egypt when the firstborn of the Egyptians died, and the Israelites were spared because of the token of blood on the lintel and the two side posts at the door of the Israelites (Exodus 12:22). The thought of divine salvation is in the background of everyone’s minds.

The crowd exclaims, “Hosanna to the Son of David” and “Hosanna in the highest.” You cannot get any higher than highest. The highest is where God, angels, and the great cloud of witnesses dwell, and where heaven is. The phrase “Son of David,” is presented several times throughout Scripture, referring to God’s promise to David that there would always be a ruler in Israel of his bloodline. Because of the sin of David’s biological children, God could not reward the Israelites with continued earthly reign from that line. What God provided instead was so much more: His own Son, also descended from the line of David through his adopted father, who would be King forever in heaven.

The word “Blessed” (Gk. eulogeo, ew-low- GEH-oh) means to speak well of. The Hebrew equivalent barak is used when the patriarchs were performing an act of adoration and a pronouncement of family prophecy and inheritance. Later in Matthew, Jesus blessed the gathered community with the Beatitudes during the Sermon on the Mount. In the context of the Beatitudes, makarios (maw-KAW-ree- oce) is the Greek word translated “blessed” and means fortunate and happy. The multitudes who witnessed Jesus’ Triumphal Entry went before and behind Jesus speaking well of “he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Matthew 21:9).

10 And when he was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?

Jesus’ spiritual power stirs up the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and every fiber of their hearts is moved. The Greek here for “moved” (Gk. seio, SAY-oh) means to agitate or cause to tremble. Again we see parallels between Jesus’ entrance into Jerusalem and His entrance into the world. Matthew’s account of Jesus’ birth also mentions the Magi’s news that there was a new King of the Jews caused Herod to be “troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matthew 2:3). In verse 10, the inquiring minds are among a group of trouble-making opponents with ill-intent toward Jesus. Some of them who are saying, “Hosanna” now would later say, “Crucify Him.” Others would sing, “Pass me not, O gentle Savior.”

11 And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee.

Matthew presents Jerusalem in a very negative light. At the beginning of the Gospel, Jerusalem is where King Herod reigns and calls for Jesus and all the young boys of Bethlehem to be murdered. Later, Joseph moves his family from Bethlehem (near Jerusalem) to Nazareth because Herod’s son Archelaus is king in Jerusalem (2:22). Early in Jesus’ ministry, when Jerusalem politics land John the Baptist in jail, Jesus moves His ministry north to Galilee (4:12). Matthew does not record Jesus returning anywhere near Jerusalem until this point. This is perhaps why the people of Jerusalem do not know who Jesus is.

In answer to their question, Jesus’ followers call Him a prophet. For the most part, the title “prophet” referred to an Old Testament character, and John the Baptist was a prophet quoting prophets and used prophetic words, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” The New Testament is a book fulfilling the

words spoken by prophets. Though Jesus is called Rabbi eight times throughout the Gospels, He is called prophet about a dozen times. Of course, Jesus also quoted Old Testament prophets. A prophet's role was to speak truth to power, and deliver God's word to the people. They might work miracles or warn of coming troubles. All of these Jesus does, so "prophet" is not an incorrect title for Him. It merely stops short of acknowledging His full title: Messiah.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Help Comes from the Lord
(Psalm 121)

TUESDAY

The First will be Last
(Matthew 20:1-16)

WEDNESDAY

The Greatest Must be a Servant
(Matthew 20:17-28)

THURSDAY

Faithful Commanded to Appear before God
(Exodus 34:23-27)

FRIDAY

Jesus Weeps Over Jerusalem
(Luke 19:41-44)

SATURDAY

Trust in the Lord
(Psalm 125)

SUNDAY

Hosanna to the Song of David!
(Matthew 21:1-11)