

Jesus enters into Jerusalem

Text: Matt 21:4-9

Suggested Hymns:

86, 112, 87, 10, 603

1) Jesus' entry into Jerusalem

2) How was Jesus received in Jerusalem?

3) How is Jesus received today?

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 21:4-9, *⁴ All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ⁵ "Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'*"

⁶ So the disciples went and did as Jesus commanded them. ⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt, laid their clothes on them, and set Him on them. ⁸ And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road.

⁹ Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD!' Hosanna in the highest!" (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today we are standing on the threshold of Holy Week. Today is Palm Sunday. Long ago, in far-away Palestine, there took place during this week and on the first day of the following week, events which must always remain fresh in the minds of believing Christians. These events can never cease to be of importance to mankind in general, because in these events was the triumphant accomplishment of God's wonderful plan of salvation.

Today we see the fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy, and how wonderful and how astounding was that fulfilment! Exactly as predicted, Jesus entered Jerusalem a few days before His great passion; even the two animals spoken of by the prophet were provided, although He, of course, made use of only one - the colt.

Today we shall consider Jesus entry into Jerusalem and how He was received by the people, both then and now. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Jesus' Entry Into Jerusalem.

About 520 years before the birth of our Saviour the prophet Zechariah prophesied, *Behold, your King is coming to you; He is just and having salvation, Lowly and riding on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.*¹

The triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem caused a great stir. We read that *"All the city was moved, saying, Who is this?"*² This question has always been a timely question because Jesus is to be the 'key or central figure' in every person's life.

Old Testament prophecies told the people to expect the King, the Messiah, who would restore the kingdom of Israel and redeem His people. He would sit upon the throne of His father David and reign over the house of Jacob forever. These prophecies gave Him impressive names, such as the Mighty God, the Prince of peace, the Son of David, and the King of glory. As a result many in Israel looked forward to new national glory, being an earthly kingdom.

Finally, in the fullness of the time, the King came, but there was very little to indicate that He was the King of glory. He was a baby, and He was poor. He was born in a stable. He looked like any other infant, weak and helpless. Throughout His life He remained poor. Many hated and despised Him. His enemies plotted to destroy Him. Jesus Himself admitted His poverty when He said, *"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."*³

Today there still are people who regard Jesus merely as a pious and good man, a lowly prophet of Nazareth who was meek and taught love and humility. A man so gentle that He richly deserved names like the Good Shepherd, beautiful Saviour, and Friend of sinners. They think of Him as being so tolerant that no one need have anything to fear from Him. They forget that He is Just and also a King.

The people of Jerusalem saw Him in His role as King, on the occasion of His triumphant entry into the city. It was nothing like the colourful display which is often made in honour of royalty and famous people today. There were no soldiers dressed in parade uniforms. There were no brass bands playing music;

there were no secret police to protect Jesus from attack; there were no dignitaries following Him according to rank or seniority; and there was no mayor to give Him the key to the city. But He did nevertheless enter Jerusalem as a king and was proclaimed to be the Son of David.

However at that time very few people really understood how Jesus could be a king. A king riding on a colt, the foal of an ass almost seems a contradiction of terms. The prophet Isaiah described Him as coming “*lowly.*” Lowly He came; not as kings usually display their kingship; but meekly, modestly, in humble guise, without the grandeur and splendour of royalty, without apparent greatness. ***Lowly, and riding: upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass*** he came.

Even in the Orient the donkey is not considered a proper animal for a warrior, let alone a king; and in the time and country of Zechariah horses were far too well known and far too common to allow us to suppose that the prophet wishes us to regard the ass as a fit vehicle for a king.

According to St John,⁴ not even His disciples understood these things at first, and their error must have been shared by very many who, misinterpreting the Messianic prophecies in a carnal manner, expected earthly glory and political power from His coming.

Yet there must have been some, at least, who recalled the familiar words of Zechariah and hailed Him as the Son of David and as the One coming in the name of the Lord with a full understanding of what these words meant!

But we now know and understand what they did not know! We know that Jesus, who was born a true man of the Virgin Mary, also was true God, begotten of the Father from eternity.

We know that this Jesus is both Saviour and Lord and that the day will come when ***every knee should⁵ bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth*** as today’s Epistle states. We know that He, who once took upon Himself the form of a servant and came to seek and to save the lost, will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead.

As we reflect today upon the fulfilment of the prophecy, the one thought uppermost in our minds is this, that our lowly Lord, was not for a moment deceived by the shouts of the jubilant crowd. He was fully aware that He was setting out on the last stage of His humiliation - His final suffering and death.

It was Christ's spectacular entry into Jerusalem that made His enemies determined to do away with Him. Frightened by the hold which He seemed to have upon the masses, these enemies looked upon the scene with smouldering fury and were determined that He must not live!

And so in Jerusalem, sadder processions followed in the following week as it saw the lowly King become a bound prisoner, led to the High Priest, to Pilate, to Herod, back to Pilate again, and finally along the Way of Sorrows to Golgotha. In His rightful capital, Jerusalem, the King of the Jews was rejected by His own people and delivered to the Gentiles to be put to death. But it was by His deepest humiliation that He attained for His own people and for the world that righteousness and salvation which was promised long ago!

Therefore, together with all true Christian believers, we rejoice today at this old prophecy and at its fulfilment. We rightly look upon the Holy Week as a solemn week; but for all that, we are not conscious of any jarring discord when at its beginning we hear the voice of Zechariah, *Rejoice greatly! O daughter of Zion! Shout, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you.*

We rejoice; though not with the short-lived rejoicing of the Jews at Christ's entry which consisted largely of wild excitement, frenzied emotion and momentary enthusiasm.

Ours is the quiet and deep joy of faith. That faith sees in Him who entered Jerusalem in lowliness none other than the King of Love and Grace, our only Saviour, who gives to all His believing subjects, those treasures so dearly attained: righteousness and salvation. Yes, there is in Him righteousness to take the place of blackest guilt.

There is salvation from sin and the curse of the Law, God's righteous wrath, death and hell! Such faith is mightily strengthened as we see the marvellous fulfilment of Zechariah's prophecy. In the lowliness of His passion we hail and claim this King as ours.

2. How Was Jesus Received By The People Of Jerusalem?

Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem must have been very colourful and impressive and the reaction of the people spontaneous, even though the event had not been elaborately planned.

Actually, preparations had been quite simple. Into Bethphage, a village just Northeast of Jerusalem, Jesus had sent two of His disciples, saying: ***“Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. ³ “And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord has need of them,’ and immediately he will send them.”*** This the disciples did, and after they had draped their clothes over the animal, they sat Him on the colt.

Now the triumphant entry began and hundreds of people crowded the streets and demonstrated their joy. Our text states, ***⁸ And a very great multitude spread their clothes on the road; others cut down branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ Hosanna in the highest!”***

Hosanna is a Hebrew word which means **“Save now.”** How pleased Jesus must have been with that reception! He had not asked them to come. He had not ordered them to acclaim Him. They came simply because they loved Him. Here in this gathering were many who had seen one or more of His miracles. Here were people who had heard some of His wonderful teachings about faith, hope, love, forgiveness, salvation, and heaven. And best of all, they now called on Him to help them and to save them.

Jesus’ ears are always open to those who in faith call upon Him, because He is our Saviour and Helper. He saved His disciples that day on the Sea of Galilee when their ship was about to sink in the storm. We read in Matthew 8:25-26 ***²⁵ Then His disciples came to Him and awoke Him, saying, “Lord, save us! We are perishing!” ²⁶ But He said to them, “Why are you fearful, O you of little faith?” Then He arose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm.***

We look to Jesus as our Helper in our physical emergencies. We depend on Him for everything we need for this body and life. Above all, we look to Him for help in our spiritual need. As the crowds in Jerusalem, men, women, and children, received Him with hosannas, so we should receive Him as our Deliverer from sin, death and hell.

But not all who were in Jerusalem that day received Jesus joyfully. As a matter of fact, we are told, in verse 15, ¹⁵ ***But when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying out in the temple and saying, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” they were indignant.*** The chief priests and scribes were raging with fury because of the hosannas of the children. And these enemies were serious, because just five days after Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem they crucified Him.

3. How Is Jesus Received By People Today?

Merely to know about Christ is not enough. Some people are well informed about Christ and His Word, but inwardly they have rejected Him.

When Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem ***“all the city was moved, saying, Who is this?”*** Many in our time do not know who He is either. In heathen lands millions are satisfied with their traditional gods and the religion of their ancestors. They are totally blind to spiritual truth. We too would be blind to it, had God not given us the revelation of His Son. Many years ago the prophet Zechariah said, ***“Tell the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your King is coming to you.’”***

The church, in turn, is obligated to tell the rest of the world that still sits in darkness and in the shadow of death about Jesus Christ. To tell them of Jesus, that He is the King of grace, because Christ Himself has asked us to be His witnesses. This we must do by whatever means is made possible to us. There may not be much time left in which to carry out the program of Christian missions, because Jesus, our King, may soon come again.

In some churches Palm Sunday is the day on which children renew their baptismal vow. At God’s altar they promise to renounce the devil and all his works and all his ways and to remain true to the triune God even unto death. Christian parents know that God has entrusted to them the training of their children.

The Lord exhorts parents in Deuteronomy 6:6-7, ***these words which I command you today shall be in your heart.*** ⁷ ***“You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.***

Centuries later God told parents, through His apostle Paul, *4 And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*⁶

Jerusalem was told, *'Behold, your King is coming to you.* Today, He still comes to us in Holy Baptism, through which He works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe. He still comes to us in His holy Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation.

He still comes to us in the Lord's Supper, through which He gives us His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins and the strengthening of our faith, so that we can successfully carry on the struggle against sin and overcome temptation.

He comes as our Saviour and King, and He must be in the centre of our lives, because *"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*⁷

While there are many today who with a joyful heart receive Jesus and His teachings, there are more who do not. What a happy world this would be if Jesus and His teachings were received not only by the church but also by the world in general. Even so, many reject Jesus and His truth.

More important, of course, is the question: How do we receive Him? Many people who profess to be Christians give the impression that they merely tolerate Jesus. They hear His Word occasionally and partake of Holy Communion on special days, but beyond that they are not interested.

Such an attitude is very disappointing to Jesus. He says, *'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'*⁸ Unless Jesus means everything to us, He means nothing. He must be the Alpha and the Omega to us. He must be the central person in our lives.

Today's Old Testament reading is still valid for today, *behold, your King is coming to you,* God has appointed the day and the hour when Jesus shall come again to judge the living and the dead. There will be no opportunity to receive Him after He has come again for Judgement.

Let us be ready by receiving Him now in Word and Sacrament. Let us welcome Jesus into our hearts as our Saviour and King. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Zec 9:9

² Matt 21:10

³ Matt 8:20

⁴ John 12:16

⁵ See also Rom 14:11, shall bow

⁶ Eph 6:4

⁷ John 3:36

⁸ Matt 22:37