

Palm Sunday – The Triumphant Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem

1. When you think of the celebration of Palm Sunday what comes to your mind?
2. Why do you think we make a big deal out of Palm Sunday? What makes it special?
3. How are Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday related in the tradition of the Church?
4. How are Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday the same?
5. How are Ash Wednesday and Palm Sunday different?

Matthew 21:1-11, Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples,² saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me.³ If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them at once.”⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying,⁵ “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.’⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them.⁷ They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them.

6. What does verse 2 say about Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem? Was it planned or spontaneous?
7. What does verse 3 say about Jesus’ control of the plan? What does this say about Jesus?
8. The Mount of Olives is a high hill east of Jerusalem that overlooked the Temple. When you think of the magnificent Temple what comes to your mind?
9. Jewish kings often rode on donkeys. What is the symbolism of Jesus riding on a donkey?
10. What is the symbolism of Jesus riding on the “colt of a donkey” rather than on a mature donkey?
11. Verse 5 is a combination of quotes from the Old Testament Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9.
12. In the first part of the quote from Isaiah we read “Say to the daughter of Zion.” Who is the daughter of Zion? Hint: people groups were often referred to using feminine terms in the Bible.
13. In the second part of the quote from Isaiah we read “Behold, your king is coming to you.” What does this say about who Jesus really is?

14. How is the Kingdom of God (Jesus' kingdom) different from the kingdom of Caesar, Herod, or even the Jewish High Priest?

15. The quote from Zechariah tells us that the king (Jesus) comes "humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden." What is unusual about a "humble" king?

Matthew 21:8-11 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" ¹⁰ And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" ¹¹ And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."

16. The timing of the Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem is very interesting. It was just before Passover. Passover is the highest Holy Day on the Jewish calendar. What does Passover commemorate?

17. How are Passover and the coming of a king who is going to save his people similar?

18. This is done at Passover. The Jewish people were one of the only people groups who refused to worship Caesar as a god. They were also prone to rebellion and political unrest. So, rebellion prone were the Jews that Caesar granted them an exception for Caesar worship, but he still requested a sacrifice be made "For" him by the Jews. Herod Antipas negotiated this with Caesar. Many think Herod tricked Caesar by promising to make a sacrifice FOR him rather than TO him.

A Little Context, In the Meantime.

Due to the annual instability of Jerusalem, and the Jewish nation at large, during Passover Pontius Pilot would come to Jerusalem from Caesarea Marittima. Pilot's entrance into Jerusalem would have happened around the same time as Jesus was making his entry into the city. But CONTRAST these two entrances. Pilot, riding a white horse symbolizing a conqueror, would have been accompanied by a cohort of heavily armed soldiers with swords and armor ready for war. He would also have been preceded by heralds, trumpeters, and singers. Pilot's entry would have been a show of POWER, AUTHORITY, and MILITARY MIGHT. It would have been a showing of EMPIRE.

Jesus' entrance on the other hand was on a colt of a donkey. Jesus was lowly and humble. Jesus was accompanied by his rag-tag disciples. This would have been a show of SHALOM (peace). This was the very opposite of Pilot's show of EMPIRE.

Note that Pilot is coming from the WEST. Jesus is coming from the EAST. This was Empire meeting Shalom (the kingdom of God). These are two kingdoms colliding. Pilot arrives with power causing fear and chaos and Jesus arrives with peace and favor causing rejoicing.