

Palm Sunday – The Triumphal Entry – Matthew chapter 21, verses 1 - 11:-

The Context:- It is worth spending a few minutes reading the different accounts in the four Gospels – Matthew 21, verses 1 – 11; Mark 11, verses 1 – 11; Luke 19, verses 28 – 44 and John 12, verses 12 – 19. Combining the information in the Gospels, it is most likely that Jesus arrived in Bethany, at the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus, on the Friday evening – John chapter 12, verses 1 – 2. The supper mentioned here in John’s Gospel would have been the Sabbath evening meal. The Sabbath Day itself would be spent in Bethany with the entry into Jerusalem taking place on the Sunday after the Saturday Sabbath rest. From this point on Jesus abandoned the cautious attitude which had caused him to withdraw from areas of tension and possible crisis (Mark 8, verse 30; John 10, verse 40 and John 11, verses 53 – 54). Now he openly challenged the Jewish leaders. In the entry into Jerusalem he openly provoked disapproval and opposition.

Matthew chapter 21, verses 1 – 7:- Jesus had left Bethany and come to the foot of the Mount of Olives. The village of Bethphage was opposite them on the slope (verse 2). We do not know if the use of the colt had been arranged previously. It reads as though it was a miraculous event! The family / neighbours question the right of the disciples to take the colt. The reply “*The Lord has need of it*” (verse 3) gave them the freedom to take it. I have no problem reconciling Matthew’s account of there being “*an ass tied and a colt with her*” with that of Mark and Luke. If the colt was not broken in (“*on which no one has ever sat*” – verse 2) then the sensible thing to do would be to lead the mother and the colt would follow! Read Zechariah 9, verse 9 for the Old Testament prophecy of the coming of the Messiah / King. The Greek version of this verse, which was in common usage at the time of Jesus, is even more explicit it states “*. . . riding on a new colt the foal of an ass*”. That the colt was docile enough to be ridden is another “nature miracle” showing the Lord’s authority over creation.

Matthew chapter 21, verses 8 – 11:- The Gospel of John, chapter 12, verse 12 says “*a great crowd . . . heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they . . . went out to meet him*”. Those who were cheering him were not just his disciples and followers but many who had heard of the raising of Lazarus joined them (John 12, verses 17 – 19). The spreading of garments and herbs before a king or great person was a widespread custom. (See 2 Kings, chapter 9, verse 13 for an example.)

The acclamations used in these verses in Matthew come from the Psalms, especially from Psalm 118, verse 26. The word “*Hosanna*” is properly a cry for help addressed to God or the King, meaning “save now” - see 2 Samuel 14, verse 4 and 2 Kings 6, verse 26. The expectation on the part of many seems to be that here was the Messiah, coming to Jerusalem to inaugurate the Kingdom of God.

Read again Matthew 21, verses 6 – 11:- If we are not careful we can miss the vital question! Many of those in the crowd on that first Palm Sunday had met Jesus or been with him for much of his ministry. They knew, or thought they knew, who he was! However the vitally important question for them and for us is - “**Who is this?**”. Who is this, who comes into his own capital city, the traditional place of the Temple of the Lord God? He is the One who was to be “*despised and rejected by men*” (Isaiah 53, verse 3); the One who “*came to his own home, and his own people received him not*” (John 1, verse 11); the One of whom even Caiaphas the high priest said “*it is expedient for you that one man should die for the people and the whole nation should not perish*” (John 11, verses 49 – 50).

Who is this? On our understanding of the answer to this question depends our eternal salvation! This is Jesus, the name given to him by the angel of the Lord before he was born, “*the one who will save his people from their sins*” (Matthew 1, verse 21). This is “*Emmanuel*” – “*God with us*” (Matthew 1, verse 23). This is the Almighty Word become flesh (John 1, verses 1 and 14).

This Easter tide may we each “*receive him and believe in his name*”, the promise then is that we “*should not perish but have eternal life*”. (John 1, verse 12 and John 3, verse 16).