

Ad Te Levavi  
2 December, AD 2018  
St. Matthew 21:1-9  
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In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Reading this text from St. Matthew again, I kept asking myself “What was it that drew these crowds together this particular time Jesus came to Jerusalem? What was so different than all the other times that Jesus had come to the holy city?” He would have made a yearly pilgrimage for the Passover and the other various feasts which God had commanded His people to observe. St. John gives us the clearest answer. He tells us that it was because Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. That was unique. Word had gotten out that this Jesus from Nazareth had simply commanded a dead man back to life by His Word. I can imagine in our day such a miracle would draw a crowd. But what that doesn’t explain are these very specific hymns of praise. It’s not the first time Jesus raised someone from the dead. Remember that he had done the same for the widow’s son at Nain.

The donkey. That’s the difference. The beast of burden which Christ desires to carry Him into Jerusalem is the last piece of the puzzle as to who this carpenter’s son truly is. There was great expectation among God’s people. Consider the last three years. John the Baptist had shown up preaching like a firebrand, baptizing people for repentance, crying out that the Lord had come to save His people just as He had promised and that axes of judgment were falling. Then Jesus begins publicly preaching and teaching, healing the sick, driving out demons, and now raising the dead. On more than one occasion, Jesus had put the Pharisees and Sadducees to shame with His divinely authoritative teaching. Anyone who was listening understood the claims He was making - that He was the Son of God, that He had come to fulfill God’s promises to His people, that He had come as a deliverer. And now this - riding on a donkey into the city of David.

Really, this wouldn’t have been such a big deal except that God had prophesied long ago through Zechariah that Zion’s eternal king would humbly come, mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. The prophet was foretelling of the destruction of Israel’s enemies and then he turned to the exiles who had only recently returned to Jerusalem and begun the process of rebuilding and he invites them to rejoice because their king, The King of kings, was coming. The exiles were still subjects of the Persians. They didn’t have their own king. They were home but they were not yet free. And the faithful, who had clung to God’s Word

and had not traded it for useless ideas of an earthly ruler over an earthly kingdom, knew exactly who that king was and what a marvelous work He would perform. This King is no one less than the Lord God Himself veiled in human flesh. And He would come not to assume an earthly throne ruling over a small chunk of land on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This King would come and crush the great tyrant who had enslaved to the whole world to eternal death - Satan.

But even that could have caused great fear because it was their spurning of this King that had caused them to be exiled in the first place. They had set up their idols and worshiped the false gods which God had explicitly condemned and forbidden them from worshipping. He had gone so far as to tell His people to wipe them out from the Promised Land, leaving nothing of their wickedness and false worship to defile God's people. But they didn't listen. They allowed a little false worship here and a little false teaching there. Pretty soon, the Israelites had forsaken the Lord who brought them out of Egypt and were giving themselves over to pagan gods and pagan practices. They disobeyed the clear command of God and as a result many fell away from the true faith and into eternal damnation.

We have done no less. We have often spurned the God who delivered our fathers from Egypt and from Babylon, the God who poured out His Blood to deliver us from our bondage to sin and death. We have allowed little bits of the leaven of unbelief to linger and take hold. We have made idols out of work, fun, sports, ease, peace, and self and offered the required sacrifices of heart and time and money. We have cast aside the Word of God so that our flesh can have its desires met. We have given lip service to Christ and His Word but, in truth, were unwilling to learn it, memorize it, and bury it deep within our hearts. The faith once given was allowed to languish because we were too proud, too lazy, or too scared to pray to our Father. We allowed ourselves to grow cold to the Body and Blood that Christ comes to give His children for their comfort and salvation. And instead of rejoicing when our Lord comes, we grumble and complain about the time lost and the money spent. We have jumped right back into the prisons and waterless pits from whence we were delivered.

Repent. Your idolatry stinks in God's nostrils just as wretchedly as Israel's did. He is no less amused and He is no less angered. Jesus isn't our excuse to live as unbelievers. He didn't come to set you free from living a life of humility, piety, and godliness. He didn't come to abolish the commandments. Do not repeat the foolishness of the Israelites who used their freedom as a cloak for unrighteousness and idolatry. And do not despise the Lord when he comes.

Rejoice! Your King has come riding on a donkey not a warhorse. He has come riding on a beast of burden because He is the burden-bearer who has born all of your unbelief and wickedness. He has born the burden of your pain and your sorrow. He has born death itself. Rather than bringing the judgment we deserve, He comes in the Name of the Lord to bring peace through the shedding of His precious Blood. This is why the crowds shout for joy and sing their loud Hosannas - they recognize that their Lord has come and that His great power is being poured out to save them, to bring them everlasting salvation. It is not the anger of God that has stirred Him up but His love and His compassion toward us poor miserable sinners. He has heard your sad and bitter cries as you suffer under sin's crushing weight. He has heard you cry out for deliverance from the cruel oppressor's rod of guilt and shame.

And He comes. He comes to redeem you. He comes with mercy and forgiveness and healing. He comes to conquer death and bestow life. He comes in the Name of the Lord not to scold you or lay burdens upon you but to bless you and to bestow upon you His kingdom of righteousness. The Lord, Jesus Christ has borne not only your flesh but also the entire load of your guilt because He wants to take it away from you and rescue you. He didn't ride into Jerusalem to conquer it but to save it and to save the whole world. Neither does your Lord come today to conquer you or to hold up your sins in front of your face or to take things from you. He has come to pour out blessings upon you, to show you the Father's mercy toward sinners, to rescue you, to heal you, to raise you from the dead and to give you a seat at His table, to feed you with the Bread of heaven. He comes to execute justice and righteousness, not by giving sinners what they deserve but by paying the price of their sin Himself and making you heirs of His kingdom.

There, seated on the humble donkey, the humble Lord rode to assume His rightful place - lifted high upon the throne of the cross to make atonement for us and to open to us the way to everlasting life. No less humbly does He still come to you today and for no different reason. Seated on the Word, seated on water and bread and wine, the Lord Jesus still comes in the Name of the Lord to rescue you from sin and death, to bring you the peace of His forgiveness and boundless mercy which cannot be understood but only received humbly by faith. He comes for you this day to make you His own and give you a share in His kingdom. It is for this reason that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity was incarnate of Virgin Mary, so that you may no longer live in fear of the wrath of God but know His mercy and forgiveness and wave palm branches of victory when He comes again in His glory. From that day forward the victory procession will never end and the voices of God's children will never be silenced.

Rejoice, children of God! Behold, Your King, the Lord who is your righteousness has come and in His kingdom you may dwell secure.

In the Name of +Jesus.