

JOY THAT THE LORD IS KING

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Readings: Mark 11:1-11, John 12:1-15

We are gathered here to celebrate the wonderful and joyful events that took place on what we now call Palm Sunday, exactly one week before the Lord rose again, as He said, on Easter morning.

The Lord, with His disciples, was on His way to Jerusalem to celebrate the great holy feast of the Passover. Towards evening on the day before Palm Sunday the Lord came to the little village of Bethany. This village was very near to Jerusalem, only about two miles away on the other side of the Mount of Olives. Here in this village of Bethany lived Martha and her sister Mary, and their brother Lazarus, whom the Lord had raised from the dead. Now, when the Lord came to Bethany, instead of going on to Jerusalem, He went to the house of Mary and Martha and of Lazarus and stayed there for the night. They prepared a supper for Him, and at this supper Mary honored the Lord by anointing Him with sweet-smelling and most precious ointment.

When morning came, they got up and went on their way to Jerusalem over the Mount of Olives, and as they were walking along the way, we are taught, the Lord sent two of His disciples to a nearby village to fetch a young colt—a young donkey's colt. He told the disciples exactly where they would find him, and if anyone should inquire why they were taking the colt, the disciples were to say that the Lord had need of him. The disciples did as the Lord told them, and they found the colt, and when they told the owners of the colt that the Lord had need of him, the owners let him go right away. The disciples brought the colt back to the Lord, and they put their garments on him to form a saddle, as it were. And they put the Lord on him and then, in this way, with the Lord riding upon the donkey's colt, and with the disciples surrounding Him, they went on their way to Jerusalem.

Now, there were a great many people in Jerusalem who had come there for the Passover. When they heard of the great miracle the Lord had performed in raising Lazarus from the dead, they were very excited and wanted to see Lazarus for themselves, so many went to Bethany. They saw the Lord there, and when the Lord set out from Bethany for Jerusalem, they also followed after; and many others in Jerusalem, when they learned that the Lord was in Bethany and was coming to Jerusalem, set out to meet Him. When the crowds that followed Him from Bethany and the crowds that came out from Jerusalem to meet Him saw the Lord sitting upon a donkey and riding upon it into Jerusalem, they rejoiced greatly. For to ride upon a donkey in those days was

permitted only to great leaders and kings, and for the Lord to be riding into Jerusalem upon a donkey meant to them that He was coming as their king and, because they knew of His great power and wisdom from His miracles and teachings, the people rejoiced greatly and sang, "Hosanna! Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord," and they took off their outer garments and put them on the road and they cut down branches and put them on the road. They cut down palm branches, which they waved as they sang "Hosanna!" to the Lord, for this is the way people in those days welcomed home their kings, especially their great, victorious kings. So the Lord rode into Jerusalem in triumph, like a king, and the chief priests and the Pharisees and the scribes, seeing this, grew fearful that the people would no longer listen to them and honor them, but only the Lord. To protect their own glory and power, they decided to get rid of the Lord and plotted to murder Him.

In joyfully welcoming the Lord as their King, the people thought of Him only as a great natural king who would lead them to victory against their enemies. They thought the Lord would help to drive the Romans away, that He would put Herod off the throne, that He would make the Jews once more a great, powerful and rich nation. But the Lord's kingdom is not of this world: His kingdom is the kingdom of heaven. He came to rule over our hearts and minds and not over our cities and countries. He came to lead us to victory against our spiritual enemies and not against our natural ones. And so the Lord did none of the things the people of Jerusalem expected Him to do: He did not drive the Romans away; He did not fight against their other natural enemies; He did not put down Herod; He did nothing to increase their riches. And because the Lord did not do what they had expected Him to and what they had wanted Him to, many of the people lost faith in Him and turned away from Him. Many, indeed, were easily led by the chief priests and the Pharisees to join the mob shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" against the Lord.

But this rejection of the Lord took place on another day. On Palm Sunday itself, when the Lord rode into Jerusalem as a king, the people rejoiced that He was King, welcoming His coming to them with gladness, even as we are to have joy that He is King and are to welcome His coming to us. For the great events of Palm Sunday which we are celebrating are not simply things that took place in the past which we are to remember with holy fear. We celebrate Palm Sunday that we might learn and keep in mind that the things which took place then are to take place again and again in the lives of all men, that they are to take place in our lives at this day.

How can this be? How can we go out to meet the Lord and to welcome His coming as a king as did the people of Jerusalem long ago? Well, we are doing so in a way right now by coming together to worship the Lord with song and with prayer. For in worshipping the Lord we show our love to Him, we show our desire to learn of His truth, and we ask that He may help us do His will. Each time we want to do the Lord's will we are acknowledging nothing else than that

we want Him to be our King and to rule over our lives. Indeed, we acknowledge the Lord as our King whenever we go to His Word to learn His truth, whenever we let that truth direct our thinking, whenever we will to do what the truth from the Word teaches, and whenever we actually obey that truth in our life. Just as we love the truth of the Lord's Word, so will we have joy that the Lord is King, that He rules our thoughts and our hearts and our lives by means of His truth.

But we must also remember the people who welcomed the Lord as King, but then turned away from Him again later on, that we may not be like them, but rather that we may be like the disciples who remained faithful to the Lord throughout. We are to remember that the reason those people turned away from the Lord again was because He had disappointed them because He had not done what they wished Him to do for them. We are like those people if we worship the Lord only to please ourselves and if we learn His truths from the Word and do them only for our own self-advantage. For if these are our reasons, we too will be disappointed to feel that the Lord has not fulfilled our wishes and our expectations of Him. Let us rather be like the disciples, who not only outwardly acknowledged the Lord as their King, but did so inwardly too. For their desire was not that the Lord should fulfill their wishes, but that they might be able to learn and do His will. If our wish is to do the Lord's will in our worship and in our learning of His Word, then indeed will the Lord come to rule over our minds, and over our hearts and our lives and we will have joy that He is King. *Amen.*