

- *When the time comes for Palm Sunday, make a point of looking out for any public re-enactment of the entry into Jerusalem, and see if you can support it or help make it into an event which speaks more fully of Christ's love to those who need to hear it.*

Final Prayer

It is through Your Passion, Lord Jesus Christ, that You showed how much You love and care for us. We know that You understand us, even if we do not always understand You; so forgive us our lack of insight, and inspire us to firmer faith and greater things. Thank You for all You have done for us, Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, Redeemer and Friend.
AMEN

Prayer

We praise You for Your plans for the World, Lord God Almighty; They are timely and great, they are magnificent and perfect.

We praise You for the good things You have in store for all of us, So help us accept Your Word and Your guidance for the whole of life.

We praise You for the redemption won for us by Jesus Christ; May we find in Him our inspiration to do what is right at all times.

Amen

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Rural life

Pray for those who face and take difficult decisions about agriculture, concerning GM crops, fertilisers and land use, all of which are important issues for the stability of our world.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for DR Congo at this time of civil war and unrest*
- *Pray for those who live within the on-going violence in Iraq*
- *Give thanks to God for water and how it sustains life*

Meditation

I need your grace, Lord Jesus Christ,
To demonstrate right attitudes in all I do; help me

- To accept the life You have given me without rancour;
- To refrain from jealousy about what You have given others;
- To hold my tongue when my petulance will create unhappiness;
- To smile because I mean it, and not allow myself be miserable;
- To question my own motives carefully, before those of others;
- To submit my frustrations to You before they rise to overpower me;
- To give my full attention to others, so they know they are heard;
- To strive to be a peacemaker, a person of mercy and love,

May I become more like You every day,
My Lord, my Master and my God.

Bible Study - Matthew 21:1-11

¹ *When they came near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples. ² He said to them, 'Go to the next village, and you will find a tethered donkey as soon as you get there, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them; and he will send them straight away.'*

⁴ *This took place to fulfil what the prophet said, ⁵ 'Tell the daughter of Zion, Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'*

⁶ *The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them;* ⁷ *they brought the donkey and the colt, put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them.* ⁸ *Then many in the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, whilst others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road.* ⁹ *The crowds that went ahead of him and those following were shouting, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!'*

¹⁰ *When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil as people asked 'Who is this?'* ¹¹ *The crowds said, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.'*

Review

Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on a donkey is one of the defining events of Jesus' life, along with His birth, His death and Resurrection. It is celebrated throughout Christendom on 'Palm Sunday', the Sunday before Easter, and is often acted out in the streets of villages, or as processions within churches. Jesus, the great popular healer and teacher, comes to the capital city of Jerusalem acclaimed by crowds of Jewish people as their long awaited Messiah, accepting their praise and acclamation 'Son of David', whilst using a donkey to symbolise peace rather than war. Meanwhile, the crowds throw palm branches and coats on the road to form a traditional royal greeting.

However, the whole event is full of pathos, for the crowds who chanted Jesus' praise eventually turned against Him to call for His death before Pilate (27:23). The whole triumphant entry was but the first 'Scene' in the final 'Act' of Jesus' life; yet the joy within the whole event is prophetic and points us towards the joy of His ultimate triumph over all evil. This victorious procession prefigures Christ's second coming, when death will be defeated and all evil will be finally overcome by the Messiah's humility, peace and love.

The Approach to Jerusalem Bethphage was a village on the edge of the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley to the north east of Jerusalem, the direction from which Jesus approached the city (21:1f.). Nearby was the village of Bethany, the home of Lazarus, Mary and Martha (John 11), which was a natural stopping point for pilgrims about to enter Jerusalem. Clearly, Jesus' entry riding on a donkey was highly symbolic, and many of the details are to be found in Old Testament prophecy. The Mount of Olives, according to Zechariah was the place where the Messiah would make His last triumphant stand against evil before His Kingdom came in power (Zech 14:4). Also, Matthew himself quotes from Zechariah 9:9 when describing the scene (21:5).

It appears that Jesus had made an arrangement with friends in Bethany for a female donkey and its male colt to be made available for the disciples to pick up (21:3), but people have long argued about whether the arrangement was miraculous or simply planned. It does not really matter, because it was regarded as an ancient royal privilege to requisition animals from people (a privilege taken by rabbis in Jesus' day). Jesus may well have taken advantage of this concession, but Matthew clearly focusses on the meaning of the entry into Jerusalem, not the meaning of the acquisition of the donkeys!

Coming in on a donkey, or a colt, or both of them? If you read Matthew's story carefully, it appears Jesus rode into Jerusalem on two donkeys simultaneously; 'They brought the donkey and the colt, put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them' (21:7)! So what does it mean for Jesus to be seated on 'them', and why does Matthew insist on two animals being used when the other Gospels include only one? There are several explanations. One is the opinion that Matthew simply quoted Zechariah and did not recognise the Hebrew 'parallelism' of the poetry which describes the animal as 'a donkey; a colt, the foal of a beast of burden'; here, the second phrase possibly just described what sort of donkey it was. Another opinion is that Matthew described Jesus as sitting on two animals at the

same time, with the coats forming a sort of 'throne'. I am not keen on the first explanation because Matthew was not that ignorant, and neither do I like the second because dressing up animals like a 'throne' does not sound very humble!

For this reason, I prefer to look at another Old Testament text from the, to 2 Samuel, where David returns to Jerusalem after defeating the rebellion against him by his son Absalom. Absalom had forced David out of Jerusalem, and as he fled, he was given two donkeys by a supporter named Ziba (2 Sam 16:1) to assist him on his way. When David returned after the awful civil war in which his son was killed, he celebrated not with great fanfares but with great humility. The two donkeys therefore serve to remind us that the 'Son of David' behaved with humility in victory, as the first David did. As to the question of which animal Jesus rode on, I prefer the idea that the text implies that Jesus rode the animals, probably one after the other, but probably not both at the same time!

The reception This whole passage is full of symbolism. When Jesus was born, Matthew described Jerusalem as 'trembling' (2:3) or 'being afraid'; and now, Jesus' entry put Jerusalem in 'turmoil' (21:10) again. The people of Jerusalem did not know what to make of His arrival from Galilee (21:11) or of the large noisy crowds of pilgrims that accompanied Him. They shouted 'hosanna', a common greeting at the major festivals of Tabernacles, Passover and Pentecost, derived from Psalm 118:25 where 'Hosanna' meant 'save us'. Just as 'God bless you' suggests a blessing today, the greeting 'hosanna' carried with it the desire for God to save His people. The word was chanted and emphasised; 'Hosanna in the highest heaven' (21:9); it was a call for God to complete His work of Salvation!

The crowd all shouted 'Hosanna' because they longed for a Messiah. Their chant was perhaps more vigorous and excited than usual, but although their ability to recognise the signs was limited, and their own fickle nature would be tragically exposed in the coming days, their chant nevertheless contained the truth of what God was about to do through Jesus. He was about to save us all!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Can you put yourself in the place of Jesus for a moment and imagine what this occasion must have felt like? In a group, share your reflections
2. Before you read this study, what picture did you have of the first Palm Sunday? How is it similar or different from Matthew's story?
3. In what ways does Jesus accept what is expected of Him as Messiah, and in what ways does He direct and determine the role?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The great occasion of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem is full of pathos of course, but it is still a scene of great rejoicing which tells us a great deal about the way God works within His world. For a few brief moments, Jesus was cheered and loved by the Jerusalem crowds, and whatever the future, I reckon that He acknowledged the praise. Certainly, we know that He was deeply appreciative of the children who cheered Him, because He recalls this later when the Pharisees challenge Him about what has happened (21:16). The story is a reminder to us that our path is victorious, however hard it may be!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Pray and ask the Lord to reveal to you the truth about the difficult things you face in your life. Pray about them in the light of this passage, knowing that the Lord can make what appears to be so hard, into a great triumph, and be encouraged.*