

Palm Sunday 2024

Matt. 21:1-9 (ESV)

“Say to the daughter of Zion, Behold, your King is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey.”

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A blessed Palm Sunday to all of you, dear ones. How wonderful it was to see the little sons and daughters of our church processing in with their palm branches singing praises to the Lord our God. How marvelous it was and how fitting it is for us now to enter into Holy Week this way just as Christ our Lord entered into the holy city so long ago—adorned with regal humility and glorious meekness on full display for all to see.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of David and true Messiah, rides into Jerusalem on a donkey. And, of course, I may not speak for everyone here among us today, dear ones, but it’s not especially clear to us here and now that we should associate a donkey with kingship and royalty.

But for ancient Near Eastern people, it couldn’t be any more clear what was happening, what was playing out right before their eyes.

For them, there was no question. Because while it’s true that a donkey, in that culture, was mainly used as a means of transit for both rich and poor, the donkey was also a staple of, an icon of ancient Near Eastern royal ceremony.

We have clear historical evidence that, in the ancient Near East, the sons of kings rode on donkeys, and, so too, that seeing someone make ceremonial entry into a city while riding on a donkey—that this in an act of kingship—it’s a claim to royalty.

You may recall, for example, how Solomon rides on King David’s own mule to Gihon in 1 Kings chapter 1; Solomon does so to be anointed king, and everybody knew it.

And so too, everybody knew what Jesus was claiming by doing what He did. It’s undeniable.

Jesus processes into Jerusalem on a donkey for His coronation and to ascend His royal throne. And, dear ones, His manner of entry is certainly revealing *culturally*, but it’s also revealing *theologically* about the manner of His reign as the King of kings and the very Prince of peace.

Jesus isn’t coming into Jerusalem while mounted up on a mighty warhorse for the purpose of doing violence and making war. No, that’s what sinful men do when they mount up high upon their pride. They proudly gallop and rush headlong into evil, and they make war against God and man.

In their arrogance, they say, “I’ll do what seems right in my own eyes. And I won’t be lectured by the likes of you. I will take no instruction, no rebuke or reproof, and I don’t care who

you are or what authority you have—prophet, priest, preacher, it makes no difference to me. I'll do as I please. And if you have a problem, then *you* are the problem, not me.”

And so, sinners go about like warlords, setting themselves against God and man, seeking to capture the city of their heart's desire, to seize it and make themselves kings by force, only then to be overtaken and bound captive and enslaved to sin.

Dear ones, maybe you've seen this reflected all too vividly in your own life when you behold yourself in the mirror of God's holy Law.

Well, behold, the Lord Jesus, Who comes not proud and riding high and lifted up on a warhorse, but humble and meek, riding on a donkey—on a beast of burden. He comes not to make *war* against God and against you, but to make *peace* between God and you—and to ascend high and lifted up on His royal throne, the cross.

He rides to Jerusalem to be crowned, not with gold and precious stones, but with thorns piercing His sacred brow, and His holy, precious blood soaking the dirt beneath Him.

This, dear ones, is the coronation and exaltation towards which Jesus rides. Like His royal entry into Jerusalem, on the cross, Christ is adorned with regal humility and glorious meekness on full display for all to see as the King of kings and the Prince of peace. And this is how He would reign in the city of your heart as well.

Having suffered the crucifixion and death deserving of a rebel warlord and criminal, having suffered this in our place, He has made peace with God on our behalf, for our benefit. And He would reign, not by force or violence, but in peace within you. Behold, your King is coming to you, dear ones, humble, by means of His holy Word and Sacraments, these lowly means.

By these, He would free us from our enslavement and captivity to sin and instead captivate us by His great love for us, because our King died for us while we were still enemies of God, while we were still high and lifted up on the mighty warhorse of our pride.

Not only does He come to give us peace, but to show us that the way of humility is the way of divine royalty and otherworldly glory.

Surely, we must lay down our weapons of war against God and man and take up our arms in prayer and praise of God and in service to one another and so prove to be true sons and daughters of our crucified and risen King.

Behold, your King comes to you, humble, dear ones, so together, then, in peace and humility, let us likewise go to meet Him.

And to the same Jesus Christ be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.