

“Who Is This?”
April 2, 2023
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Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Good morning, Church! I want to read a passage of scripture that comes from the book of Matthew, chapter 21. I bet you can guess what it is today!

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, tell him the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”

This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

The two disciples went and did as Jesus instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those who followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”

“Hosanna in the highest!”

When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

May God bless the reading of His Word.

As a pastor I love, from time to time, to be incognito. You can learn a lot about people when you're incognito and they have no idea who you are. Last Sunday, Jeannine and I went to another church. They had no clue who we were and we learned a lot about them. When people find out you're a pastor, sometimes they treat you differently. I don't know how many times it's happened to me that people have found out that I was a pastor. After a while they said, “Oh, Pastor, if I had just known!” One of the strangest compliments I ever got came a number of years ago. A bunch of my guys were standing around and talking, like guys do, and I walked up amongst them. They were young guys, and we were talking and joking and laughing, and one of my guys said, “You know, Pastor, you know what I like about you?” I said “No, Brian. What?” He said, “You're like a real guy!” Like a real guy! Aaron, did you know that? When you become a minister, if you work really hard, you can be like a real guy!

There was a lot of buzz about Jesus of Nazareth on that Passover week. There were people speculating whether he would come to the Passover at all. And if he came, he certainly would come incognito; he would slip in the back door and stay in the shadows. But Jesus entered Jerusalem in a manner that focused all eyes on him. He came in center stage. So, let me set the stage for you and let's talk about what happened that day. This is the biggest stage possible for the Jewish people, their greatest holiday. It is

a commemoration of their deliverance from slavery and Egypt. On this particular Passover it had extra poignancy, as they found themselves once again subjected to another nation, the Romans. There's much debate on how big Jerusalem was during the time of Christ, but good scholarship says it was probably between 100,000 and 250,000 people. About five years after the death of Christ a census was taken during Passover, not of the people in Jerusalem, but rather the lambs that were slaughtered for Passover. Now, I have been thinking of how to say this without being too graphic. So let me try. The lambs were killed by bleeding. They weren't killed and then bled. They were killed by bleeding. The blood was collected and splashed on the altar. Five years after the death of Christ, 250,000 lambs were killed. Let that scene sink in for you for just a moment. Jewish law demanded that there be at least 10 people for every lamb killed, because the lamb was to be completely consumed before the evening was over. That meant in Jerusalem there were 2,500,000 people in a city of 250,000. Nationalism and religious fervor were at a peak. This is the scene.

Jesus carefully plans out his entrance. This isn't Jesus saying to his guys, "Hey, let's try this!" He had carefully planned and orchestrated his entry into Jerusalem. He did so to communicate unmistakably who he was and why he was there. The crowds greeted him in three different ways. They greeted him as a fellow pilgrim. The greeting of a fellow pilgrim coming into Jerusalem was, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" When someone came through the gates of Jerusalem, they would be greeted with "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" They greeted him as a conquering king. When Judas Maccabeus and his army defeated Antiochus Epiphanes of the Greeks and drove them out of Jerusalem and out of Palestine, when they entered Jerusalem, the people of Jerusalem cut palm branches from the trees, lined the streets, and waved the palm branches over them, and they greeted him as a conquering hero. And that is exactly how the crowds greeted Jesus. They also greeted him as a deliverer. In our society, we use the term "Hosanna" as a praise. It was not a praise during that time. It means: "Save us! Save us now!" So, when the crowds greeted Jesus coming into Jerusalem, they were saying, "You are one of us, and you are our deliverer. Deliver us! Save us now!"

But Jesus proclaimed something different. All that Jesus did was a deliberate attempt to communicate his message. Jesus was following a time-honored method of communication. For literally thousands of years, when the prophets of Israel's words failed them, they acted out their message. And that is exactly what Jesus did. He proclaimed himself Messiah in an unmistakable way. But he proclaimed himself a particular type of Messiah: not a conquering hero, not a military King, not someone who was bringing military might, but someone who was bringing peace. He came there not for war, but for love. He came there not to bring destruction, but to bring peace. He came gentle and riding on a donkey, proclaiming himself to be the Prince of Peace. But he did something else, too. The manner that he entered into Jerusalem focused all eyes on him. Make no mistake. What Jesus did that Sunday was throw down the gauntlet. It was a challenge. He was saying to the people of Jerusalem and the religious leaders, "You will make a decision about me. You will not ignore me. You will accept me or reject me, but you will make a decision about me." Jesus proclaimed very clearly who he was and why he came. And he confronted the people of Jerusalem with a question: "Who do

you say I am? Who am I to you?"

Jesus claimed himself to be Messiah, God's Anointed One, the Son of God, and God the Son. He confronted the people of Jerusalem with a choice: "Who do you say I am?" And as we make our way toward Good Friday and Easter Sunday, on this Palm Sunday we are confronted with the same question: Who is Jesus to you? People through the centuries have answered that question in many ways, but generally in three categories. Jesus Christ is either a liar, a lunatic, or he is Lord. If he was not who he proclaimed himself to be, and he knew he was not who he proclaimed himself to be, then Jesus Christ was the greatest liar the world has ever known. And He has deceived millions in every generation. If he wasn't who he said he was, but he thought he was, then he was crazy. My dad would add something about that, some stuff. He was crazy. Back in the old days, if we wanted to be very kind and wanted to say somebody was crazy, we would say, "They are a couple of French fries short of a Happy Meal." If he was not who he said he was, but he thought he was, and he went through all that he went through, then he was absolutely nuts. But if he wasn't a liar, and if he wasn't a lunatic, and he was who he said he was, that means he's Lord.

And today we are confronted with that question and each one of us must respond to that question ourselves. Who is Jesus Christ to you?

Let us pray. So, in the quiet of this time, answer that question for yourself.

Lord, today we, Your children, Your followers, Your believers, Your disciples, we proclaim You Lord: the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. Lord, we acknowledge You as our Savior, as our Deliverer, as our Messiah. And as we begin this Holy Week, Lord, we pray that You would be ever before our eyes, ever on our minds, and ever in our hearts. In Christ's name, amen.