

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion At the Procession with Palms

Luke 19:28-40

28 After he had said this, he proceeded on his journey up to Jerusalem. 29 As he drew near to Bethphage and Bethany at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples. 30 He said, "Go into the village opposite you, and as you enter it you will find a colt tethered on which no one has ever sat. Untie it and bring it here. 31 And if anyone should ask you, 'Why are you untying it?' you will answer, 'The Master has need of it.'" 32 So those who had been sent went off and found everything just as he had told them. 33 And as they were untying the colt, its owners said to them, "Why are you untying this colt?" 34 They answered, "The Master has need of it." 35 So they brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks over the colt, and helped Jesus to mount. 36 As he rode along, the people were spreading their cloaks on the road; 37 and now as he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to praise God aloud with joy for all the mighty deeds they had seen. 38 They proclaimed: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest." 39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." 40 He said in reply, "I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out!"

Introduction. With the royal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, a new section of Luke's gospel begins, the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem before his death and resurrection. Luke suggests that this was a lengthy ministry in Jerusalem (Luke 19:47; 20:1; 21:37-38; 22:53) and it is characterized by Jesus' daily teaching in the temple (Luke 21:37-38). For the story of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, see the parallel accounts in Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; John 12:12-19)

The "Palm Sunday" entrance into Jerusalem is quite familiar to us. So familiar that we should be careful about what Luke actually writes so that we do not "fill in the details."

- It is quite ironic to read this as the processional gospel on "Palm" Sunday. There are no "branches of palms" mentioned in Luke's account as in John (12:13). There are no "leaves from the field" as in Mark (11:8). There are no "branches from the trees" as in Matthew (21:8). There are no leaves or branches of any type mentioned in Luke. (Note that only John talks about "palms"!)
- the disciples and people do not shout "hosanna" -- an Aramaic phrase meaning, "Save us, I pray."

However, Luke does provide two details not present in the other accounts:

- *...the whole multitude of his disciples began to praise God aloud with joy for all the mighty deeds they had seen(v. 37).*
- *Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples." 40 He said in reply, "I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out!" (vv. 39-40).*

Arrival at Jerusalem. Jesus' long journey to Jerusalem reaches its goal as he enters from the east through the small villages of Bethphage and Bethany. The troop pauses at the Mount of Olives while Jesus sends two disciples on a errand to retrieve a colt. To judge from the space devoted to it, the disciples' errand is considered very special. Perhaps Jesus' foreknowledge or messianic authority is implied in the mysterious instructions about

getting the colt/ass. When the disciples return they take an active part in the procedure, laying their cloaks on the colt and on the roadway, and helping Jesus to mount. Their cry of praise in Luke's account emphasizes that Jesus comes as king. Their words (*"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest."*) are similar to the words of the angelic chorus at Jesus' birth (2:14) signaling the fulfillment of the prophecy made then.

"Peace" (*eirene*) is emphasized in Luke (14 occurrences in Luke; 7 in Acts). This theme begins at the end of Zechariah's song: *"to guide our feet into the way of peace"* (1:79). It continues with the angels song: *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"* (2:14). It shows up in Simeon's song: *"Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word"* (2:29). An emphasis for Luke is that salvation consists partly in living at peace with God and with each other – Jews and Gentiles, male and female, rich and poor, slaves and free. At the same time, he is aware that Jesus' peace causes divisions: *"Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!"* (12:51).

Behind this event and the narratives is the prophetic oracle of Zechariah:

*"Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion,
shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem
See, your king shall come to you;
a just savior is he,
Meek, and riding on an ass"* (Zech 9:9).

Only Matthew makes specific reference to it (Matt 21:5). This background explains the mention of peace in Luke's account (vv. 38, 42). Riding on an ass was not so much an emphasis on humility as on peacefulness. Kings rode horses when they came in war (Jer 8:6); entering Jerusalem on an ass indicates the kind of kingship Jesus is exercising. The two disciples are sent to find an animal that has never been ridden before. Animals for certain types of ritual use had to be previously unused, like the cows chosen to pull the ark of the covenant (1 Sam 6:7; see Num 19:2). The Greek Septuagint version of Zech 9:9 speaks of a "new" colt.

The Pharisees think that Jesus' disciples have gone too far, making claims for him that he would not dare make. But Jesus replies that the time for proclamation of his full identity and mission has come. God's plan must be revealed now, even if the stones must be called into service.

In all three accounts this event marks the public acclamation of Jesus as the Davidic Messiah. Earlier he had silenced such acclaim (4:41; 5:14). Jirair Tashjian writes:

Throughout his ministry Jesus was extremely hesitant to speak of his messianic identity and he sternly ordered his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah (Luke 9:20-21). Yet, as he enters Jerusalem he does so in a manner that would clearly be interpreted as a messianic act. The crowd of disciples jubilantly proclaim Jesus as the royal Messiah. Why is it that now Jesus allows and seemingly encourages such uninhibited acclaim of him as Messiah when all along he had been extremely reticent? Perhaps one reason why Jesus had earlier been so silent about his identity and had urged his disciples to tell no one that he was the Messiah was that he did not want to encourage messianic

expectations that were nationalistic and political in nature and therefore contrary to his own understanding of suffering messiahship. But now that he was about to enter Jerusalem and face rejection, hostility, humiliation and death, the possibility of misunderstanding the nature of his messiahship was no longer an issue. Now that the time of his suffering and death drew near, he could expressly demonstrate that he indeed was the Messiah.

To Jewish ears that was, of course, an oxymoron. The Messiah does not suffer. The Messiah comes to conquer and judge. It was necessary that the disciples of Jesus openly accept and proclaim his messiahship on the eve of his suffering and death. Jesus acted out the role of the Messiah in unmistakable terms to create a situation in which the disciples would face and experience the devastating realization that this Messiah was the anointed servant of God who would suffer and die. The world of the disciples will be shattered before they are able to experience a new revelation of God and a new understanding of what it means to follow a suffering Messiah.

Although outside the Palm Sunday procession gospel, this scene continues with prophetic inference: “⁴¹ As he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it, ⁴² saying, “If this day you only knew what makes for peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes.” Like Jeremiah at an earlier time (Jer 8:18–23), Jesus laments the blindness of Jerusalem to the evidence of God’s plan for her. She will not accept the true peace he offers by his entry. Jesus foresees the days of Jerusalem’s destruction by Rome in A.D. 70. Destruction came once when the city would not listen to Jeremiah and the other prophets; this time it will be because of failure to accept the Messiah.

Notes

19:29. Bethany...Bethphage : a village about 2 miles from Jerusalem on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives. The location of Bethphage is not known for certain, but clearly it was nearby. In the Talmud it is apparently a suburb of Jerusalem, being regarded as the outer limit of the city.

19:35 colt: The reference to the “colt” (*pōlos*) that had never been ridden (v.30), and the use of the verbs *epibibazō* (“to cause someone to mount, to put on” [v.35]) and *chairō* (“rejoice” [v.37]), suggest an allusion to Zech. 9:9 LXX, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion ... your king comes to you ... riding on a new donkey” (*chaire ... epibebēkōs epi hypozygion kai pōlon neon*), a text that speaks of a humble and gentle king who is victorious because God has delivered him and who brings peace and prosperity. Other scholars refer to the account in 1 Kings 1:28–53, depicting Solomon riding on David’s mule (*hēmionos*), which was symbolically significant for the new king’s claims to be David’s legitimate successor. If the narrative of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem alludes to Solomon, then Luke may want to reinforce the idea that even though Jesus’ royal credentials are authentic, he will not usurp political power but, like Solomon before him, will wait to receive it at the appropriate time.

19:38 Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord: only in Luke is Jesus explicitly given the title king when he enters Jerusalem in triumph. Luke has inserted this title into the words of Psalm 118:26 that heralded the arrival of the pilgrims coming to the holy city and to the temple. Jesus is thereby acclaimed as king (see Luke 1:32) and as the

one who comes (see Malachi 3:1; Luke 7:19). Peace in heaven...: the acclamation of the disciples of Jesus in Luke echoes the announcement of the angels at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:14). The peace Jesus brings is associated with the salvation to be accomplished here in Jerusalem.

19:39 *rebuke your disciples*: this command, found only in Luke, was given so that the Roman authorities would not interpret the acclamation of Jesus as king as an uprising against them; cf Luke 23:2–3.

19:40 *I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out!*: Jesus' response to the Pharisees' request for the disciples to stop the celebrating crowd, possibly alludes to Hab. 2:11, "for the stone will cry out from the wall," in a passage in which the prophet levels charges against the Chaldeans and predicts their eventual destruction, calling in v. 11 inanimate objects to witness the divine judgment. If Hab. 2:11 is in view, then Jesus' reply may imply a comparison of Habakkuk's Chaldeans with the citizens of Jerusalem, expressing the notion that Jesus regards the Jerusalemites' failure to welcome him as more heinous than the sins of the Chaldeans (cf. 10:12–14), or it may be a veiled threat of the future destruction of the city. The later rabbis used Hab. 2:11 similarly.

Some commentators have argued that in 19:40 the stones of the temple are in view (cf. Ps. 118:26: "We bless you from the house of the Lord"), advancing three reasons for this interpretation: (1) there is a wordplay on "stone" in the temple scenes in 19:44; 20:6, 17–18; 21:5–6; (2) after his arrival, Jesus immediately enters the temple (19:45–46); (3) in his references to Ps. 118:22 Luke contrasts the stones of the temple with Jesus as the divinely chosen cornerstone. Others see Jesus' reply as a straightforward metaphor, similar to OT texts that speak of creation responding with joy to the coming of God (Ps. 96:11–13; Isa. 55:12). These scholars suggest that the responses of Jesus' disciples and the response of the stones are equivalent: this moment is of such importance that it must find a response—if not a human one, then another.