

Our Sunday Readings

Procession with Palms: MATTHEW 21:1-11
 ISAIAH 50:4-7
 PSALM 22:8-9, 17-20, 23-24
 PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11
 Passion Narrative: MATTHEW 26:14 – 27:66

His Earthshaking Arrival

Prayer

*adapted from the Opening Prayers
for Palm Sunday*

Almighty, ever-living God,
you have given us Jesus Christ our
Savior as a model of humility,
gentleness and self-giving love.

He fulfilled your will by becoming
human and giving his life on the cross.
Through his life, death, and
resurrection, all creation has been
freed from sin and death.

Guide our minds by his truth, and
strengthen our lives by the example of
his death, that we may live in union
with you in the kingdom of your
promise.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.



Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king shall come to you;
a just savior is he, meek, and riding on a donkey...
The warrior's bow shall be banished,
and he shall proclaim peace to the nations.
His dominion shall be from sea to sea,
and from the river to the ends of the earth.

—Zechariah 9:9-10

MATTHEW 21:1-11

Reading closely

1. What is the significance of Jerusalem?
2. What might the disciples have thought as they carried out Jesus' instructions?
3. Why does Matthew quote the passage from Zephaniah?
4. Who praises God? For what do they praise God?
5. What might have prompted the crowd to act as they did?
6. What does *hosanna* mean?
7. When do we repeat these words of praise?
8. How does the city react?
9. Who would have been especially concerned by Jesus' manner of entry?
10. What do the crowds call Jesus? How well do they seem to understand him?



Applying the word

11. When have you welcomed Jesus? When were you *shaken* or unnerved by him?



by Duccio di Buoninsegna

MATTHEW 21:1-11

Symbolic arrival

By the time Jesus enters Jerusalem he knows that his ministry will provoke those in authority to crucify him. Crucifixion was Rome's way of warning people not to cause trouble. Jesus disregards the danger and enters the Roman-occupied Jerusalem in a deliberately symbolic way.

- By riding a donkey Jesus evokes the prophesy of Zephaniah (see cover)
- Both the word *hosanna* and palm branches were used in Jewish celebrations of nationhood, which the Romans would not have liked

Shaking the city

The manner of Jesus' entry into the city threatens those in power. Jerusalem's leaders don't realize that Jesus isn't a political or militant messiah but a gentle, non-violent one, so they orchestrate his crucifixion. The long-awaited descendant of King David enters David's city, but the throne he will ascend is the cross.

Soon after Jesus was born, Magi visited Jerusalem in search of the *newborn king*. Their arrival caused the inhabitants and leadership to be shaken (2:3). Jerusalem is again shaken when the adult king enters the city (21:10). Although the city ultimately rejects its king, the people of other nations will accept him. The Magi foreshadow this.



from the Basilica of St. Mary Major

MATTHEW 27:45-56

Matthew's account of Jesus' death is filled with supernatural signs that show the significance of the event: the death and resurrection of Jesus changes everything. Signs that a new age has come are...

- an eclipse
- the tearing of the cloth that separated the holiest part of the Jerusalem Temple from the outer room
- an earthquake (only in Mt); another earthquake will signal the arrival of an angel at the empty tomb (28:2)
- holy people are raised from the dead (only in Mt)

Once creation declares the importance



of Jesus' death, so do the soldiers (v.54).

Jesus' death seems like a shameful defeat, but in truth it shakes up the whole world. Jesus' faith-filled persistence and gentleness in the face of rejection and violence are more powerful than the forces that opposed him.

JUDAS, THE BETRAYER

Thirty pieces of silver is a very small amount of money (26:14f). Judas is portrayed as caring so much about money that he'll betray his own master for even a small amount of it.

The Gospels of Matthew and John portray Judas as being greedy, but this may be an attempt to explain why he betrayed his master. Greed might not be the whole story.

Judas might have become too disturbed by everything that Jesus was saying and doing. In clear and startling ways Jesus was replacing Judaism with himself. Perhaps these changes were too much for Judas to accept.

Matthew records that Judas hanged himself (27:5). The Book of Acts details



how he died after somehow stumbling (Acts 1:18). Both are unhappy endings, but in Matthew Judas shows regret: he tries to give the money back (27:4).

MATTHEW 27:45-56

Reading closely

1. What unusual events accompany Jesus' death? How do they affect your sense of what's happening?
2. Why do you think Jesus shouted, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
3. Why do you think a bystander offered Jesus wine?
4. What might the centurion and other soldiers have thought of Jesus?
5. What was the relationship of the women to Jesus?
6. Where are Jesus' other disciples?
7. What might the Roman soldiers have done when the crucifixion was over?

Applying the word

8. How might Jesus have acted differently during his Passion?
9. What helped Jesus to persevere? Through what must you persevere?
10. Why do you think Judas betrayed Jesus? How have you betrayed Jesus?