

**Matthew 21:1-11 – Palm Sunday – Hosanna in the Highest – March 29, 2026**  
+In Nomine Iesu+

Our Gospel reading today is Jesus' triumphal entry. And here, we get a brief reprieve from the somber tone of Lent. Jesus' followers worship—waving palm branches, with jubilant singing, and glad shouts of “Hosanna in the highest.”

*Hosanna* is Hebrew. It is a cry for God to save. It comes from Psalm 118. In English, the Psalmist says, “Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.” And this faithful crowd uses this Psalm to welcome Jesus as the great Deliverer. And they are not wrong—even if they are yet to grasp the method of their deliverance.

Jesus has a significant number of followers at this point. Luke uses the word *multitude*. Some might just be curious—others are caught up in the moment. But there are a few who are truly devout, pious, faithful. And this is what the faithful do. They sing. They worship. They are glad for His true presence.

They surround Him—coming before Him and behind. The Lazarus miracle especially caught their attention. They have followed Him from Bethany and Jericho to join Him for the Passover. And now, their voices ring with songs of praise.

They also throw their cloaks on the ground in humble submission. They cut palm fronds to further prepare the way. Palms are a symbol of the nation as God's people. They are images of the tree of life engraved on the temple walls.

The people recognize Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey—like the earliest kings of Israel—David and Solomon. Jesus is the King of the Jews. He is their long-awaited Savior. He is Christ the Lord. And that's what the Triumphal Entry means.

Now, we know what follows. We have been walking through the words of Jesus from the cross on Wednesdays. And so, we have spent extra time with the crucifixion. There will be another crowd that will call for Pilate to crucify Jesus in just a few days. The Pharisees, and Chief Priests, and Romans will all struggle with what to do with this King. It's been a problem for a while. It's still a problem. But now, it is all coming to a breaking point.

Immediately after our reading, Jesus cleanses the Temple. It is a defiant act. He overturns the tables of the money-changers—who were using this space to make a profit for themselves—and to exploit the faithful. The Temple is Jesus' House. We know that from His earliest days.

And the Temple was always to be a house of prayer. Jesus wants us to know what proper worship looks like. And it is not about selling products—or consumerism—or even popularity. As you can imagine, clearing the temple was not well-received by the Jerusalem hierarchy.

Again, Jesus' followers get it right. At Passover, the Israelites would always sing the *Hallel*—which consisted of Psalms 113-118. And these Psalms—when you spend some time with them—express a profound messianic hope—now fulfilled in Jesus.

They also linked their Hosannas with the title, “Son of David.” Remember that David was the King of Israel and Judah. And he was the one who received God's promise for an eternal throne. Matthew builds this connection with his reference to Zechariah 9, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

As you can see, this is not just a quaint little Sunday ride through the Judean hills. Jesus is making a claim. He is the King of the Jews. Actually, He is King over all creation—then and now. And He is to be received with worship. And Jerusalem at least understands His claim. They see what Jesus is saying—what His followers are saying. Matthew tells us the whole city was stirred up about this.

It reminds me of the reaction of the people of Jerusalem to the arrival of the Magi more than 30 years earlier. Herod and the Chief Priests were not pleased with the news. And now, once again, Jesus' presence undermines their ideals—their place and their nation—as Caiaphas says. And again, instead of worshipping Him, they conspire to have Him killed. And it is their response that drives the whole encounter to the cross. The religious establishment thoroughly misunderstands Jesus.

Notice that there are two reactions. Jesus' followers sing—they worship—they follow. They meet this moment with joy, anticipation, and hope. But Jesus' opponents question, criticize, and conspire. They see Jesus as an obstacle to their plans—and to the whole direction of their lives.

I think these are still the two reactions. We are at a different moment in redemptive history. And we even have a few advantages. We know the rest of the story. Jesus dies on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. And He takes His life back up again for our justification—and our future resurrection. And we also have two thousand years of church history to help us make sense of Jesus' presence in the world. But many still see Jesus, the Church, and God's Word as an obstacle, a burden, a problem.

As we enter Holy Week, maybe this is a moment to test our own hearts. It is a moment to give thought to the actual condition of our souls. What is our response to Jesus? There are so many questions that might help us assess our hearts. Do we welcome Him into our lives? Does Jesus' word change our ideals—our priorities—our schedules? Is worship—attending, participating—singing—our highest good? Or do we squeeze Him in when we have time? Do we mean the words we say on Sunday morning—or is this just mindless repetition—because this is what we have always done?

I hope that none of us react like the religious establishment of Jesus' day. Their response is dismissive and defiant. They reject Jesus—both His Word and His ways. They live as if they matter most—and Jesus doesn't matter at all. They are willing to have Him killed—simply because He is in their way.

Maybe Jesus gets in the way for us sometimes as well. He demands too much of our time. Here we are at church again—and six more times just this week. He expects us to fast and pray. He expects us to pay attention to His Word—and walk in His ways. But we prefer our own thoughts—and our own way. Our schedules are our own—and no one tells us what to do. We don't want to get too crazy with all of this Jesus stuff.

But what if we joined the crowd of Jesus' followers today? We don't find many useful crowds in the Gospels. We don't find many useful crowds today. The crowd is almost always wrong. And, we could argue they aren't perfect here. But they do pretty well. Granted, this is a crowd of followers, disciples, those who have seen the miracles of Jesus. They have heard Jesus' teaching. They have witnessed the signs. And now, they welcome Jesus with the cry *Hosanna*. They call Him the Son of David. They sing. They hope. They show their opposition to the corruption of Jerusalem. And they are even willing to call Jesus a prophet.

Now, Jesus is more than a prophet. He is more than Isaiah, Jeremiah, or even John the Baptist. And maybe they are not all quite ready to say that. Jesus is the One Eschatological Prophet that Moses predicted in Deuteronomy 18. Here, he says, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen.”

At the Transfiguration, Matthew hints at this identity for Christ, with the words of the Father booming down from above, just like at Mt. Sinai, “Behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.’”

And this is what these followers had been doing—even though they may not fully understand Jesus’ identity. He is the Son of David—but He is also the Son of God. And soon, they will come to terms with such things.

So, how about you? What’s your reaction? How do you respond to Palm Sunday and the Triumphal Entry? Do you worship? Do you sing? Do you rejoice? Do you understand what Jesus is doing and why He is doing it? Do you recognize Him as your King? Are you willing to follow? What is the condition of your soul?

As Jesus enters Jerusalem for this climactic week, everything about Himself and His mission comes into focus. Everything He taught—every miracle He performed—every kind moment—now find their fulfillment in the deeds of Holy Week. His passion, death, burial, and resurrection are the most important things that have ever happened.

Holy Week is clearly the emphasis of each of the four Gospels. They spend more time with this week of Jesus’ life than with anything else. On average, one-third of the Gospels focus on this week. And this is the most important week on our calendars too. The church has set aside time for worship during Holy Week from the beginning. It is already a tradition at the time of Athanasius in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

Here, Jesus will teach, especially about the end of the world—and especially with parables. He will share the Passover with His Disciples. He will institute the Eucharist. He will pray in the Garden of Gethsemane. He will be betrayed into the hands of sinners. He will be falsely accused and misunderstood at trial.

And here, Jesus will establish a new covenant in His blood. With His sacrifice on the cross, the actual atonement for our sin is accomplished. And this moment becomes the basis for the creation of a new “chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession.” And as He is high and lifted up, we are drawn into His life, death, and resurrection. We are made participants with Christ in all that He came to accomplish. Holy Week is for us.

And singing our Hosannas is the only godly response. You will get your chance in just a few moments. The Hosannas make it into our sacramental liturgy every week. We call this the *Sanctus*. We begin with heavenly worship from Isaiah 6. And we conclude with earthly worship, from Palm Sunday. We join this crowd of followers that welcomed Jesus, singing Psalms about Jesus—singing Psalms to Jesus—even as they recognized Him as their King.

“Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” “Save us, we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD! We bless you from the house of the LORD.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.