

Sunday of the Passion
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Liturgy of the Palms

Matthew 21:1-11

The author of the First Gospel has taken his story from Mark 11:1-10, but in seeking to locate a biblical text that might be taken to predict this event, the author has used Zechariah 9:9. He takes Zechariah's reference to a "donkey" and to a "colt" as meaning that there were two animals for Jesus to ride and so alters the text of Mark to reflect that belief. Hence, we have the image of Jesus riding into Jerusalem mounted on two animals (Matthew 21:7). The expression *hosanna* in Hebrew means something like "Please save!" and is often used in the Hebrew Bible as a plea to God or to the king. Although the crowd greeted Jesus as Messiah outside the walls of the city, as soon as they get inside the walls, the members of the crowd will only confess that he is a "prophet" (21:11).

Proclamation Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

Jewish tradition categorizes Psalm 118 as one of the *Hallel* ("praise") psalms sung before and after the Passover meal. Modern scholarship would call it an individual *psalm of thanksgiving*. The opening of the temple gates to the psalmist (118:19-20) suggests that the psalmist has received deliverance from mortal illness only but also from an illness such as leprosy that had left the psalmist maimed or unclean and thereby unqualified to enter the temple precincts. In this psalm we find many descriptions of liturgical activity, and in 118:19-29 we discover a rather explicit description of a service of thanksgiving.

Liturgy of the Word

Isaiah 50:4-9a

The so-called Second Isaiah has incorporated this song as the third of the so-called "Servant Songs" (Isaiah 42:1-9; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). Scholars have debated both the identity of the servant and the independence of the songs for years; but most researchers believe that the servant of the songs represent exiled Israel, awaiting the salvation of God in Babylon.

Psalm 31:9-16

This psalm includes both a *lament* (verses 1-18) and a *thanksgiving* (19-24). As is the case with several of the laments, the complaints are fairly general, thus allowing worshipers to use the prayer in many different situations; but the principal complaints have to do with enemies. After praying a lament, the worshiper would return to the temple to thank God for fulfilling the petition. This public declaration of God's faithfulness functioned to encourage others to call upon the Lord in times of distress.

Philippians 2:5-11

Researchers often refer to this passage as the "Christ Hymn," and most believe that Paul has cited it from the living tradition of the church, having altered it only with the addition of the words "even death on a cross" (2:8).

Matthew 26:36-27:66

Matthew's story of the Passion reproduces Mark's with only minor changes but also greatly expands it. Matthew takes more interest in Judas than does Mark and adds in 26: 3, 57 the name of Caiaphas as the high priest. Matthew has also added stories about the guards in 27:36, 27:62-66. Pilate's wife's dream (27:19) and Pilate's washing of his hands (27:24) occur only in Matthew. The willingness of the crowd to accept responsibility for the crucifixion takes part in a tendency of late first century Christianity to shift blame for Jesus's death away from the Romans to the mob.

OR

Matthew 27:11-54

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