

What Kind of King?

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Palm Sunday Weekend 3/28-29/2026
Year A: Mt 21:1-11 and Phil 2:5-11

Matthew 21:1-11

¹ When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” ⁴ This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

⁵ “Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

⁶ The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; ⁷ they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. ⁸ A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. ⁹ The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹⁰ When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” ¹¹ The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶ who, though he existed in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,
⁷ but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
assuming human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a human,
⁸ he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death—
even death on a cross.

⁹ Therefore God exalted him even more highly
and gave him the name
that is above every other name,

¹⁰ so that at the name given to Jesus
every knee should bend,

in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Look at Jesus. See how He enters the city. Watch how He uses power. Power that can make cities tremble with hope. His gentle, steady way offers peace from the anxious stories that fill our minds and hearts.

It was Passover. Passover is the eight-day springtime celebration including a two day Seder meal which recounts the ancient Israelites' Exodus from Egyptian slavery under King Pharaoh. This year Passover for Jews will begin at sundown on April 1st and end at nightfall on April 9th. On Maundy Thursday this week, we too, we have our own Seder Meal, to remember the story and see how Jesus changed the Passover to Holy Communion.

It was Passover in Jesus' day. The city would have been filled with hundreds of thousands of pilgrims, as it was required that every Jewish male make the trip to Jerusalem at least three times in their lifetime to celebrate Passover. Remembering this scriptural event brought up feelings of hope for Jews that one day they too would be freed from the oppression of Rome.

It was at this time that Jesus, coming from Bethany on the east side of Jerusalem near the Mount of Olives, rode the two miles into the city. It was from the east side that the new King would arrive. In Matthew's Gospel, it says that Jesus rode not only one donkey but her colt as well. Why? What?

The prophecy in Zechariah. "Rejoice greatly, daughter Zion! Shout, daughter Jerusalem!, See your king comes to you righteous and victorious lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. I will take away the Chariots from Ephraim and the warhorses from Jerusalem and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations his rule will extend from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth."

Again and again in Israel's religious history, when a prophet felt that words were finally of no avail, he put his message into a dramatic act that people could not fail to see and understand.¹¹

Jesus was enacting the ancient prophecy. He was declaring without words that he was Messiah. He was their new king. He was the one to come and free them from Rome's oppression. No one needed a sermon to understand what their eyes saw.

'Watch Jesus. See how He enters the city. Watch how He uses power.'ⁱⁱ

At this point, the people do not understand that Jesus isn't the kind of king they hope for. They hope for a King with power and an army that will take on Pontius' Pilate. But in the moment... They love what they see. It is understood immediately.

They lay palm branches on the ground and they shout 'hosanna', a cry for help of people in distress to their king. Hosanna means 'save now!' And 'hosanna in the highest' means let even the angels in the highest heaven cry unto God, save now!

Imagine their exhilaration! Imagine their tears of joy and relief that this Jesus might truly be the one to ease their lives of pain and distress. The Jews had waited centuries for this Savior. Could this be the moment?! Is Jesus their Messiah and King?

"HOSANNA! HOSANNA IN THE HIGHEST!" Tears, joy, palm branches waving with relief and gratitude and praise to God.

Jesus doesn't stop to accept their accolades. He simply keeps riding. Gentle. Steady. Even though He was God, He humbled Himself. Looking upon the crowds with love. On a donkey with her foal following behind. Isn't that just like Jesus? To not separate a nursing foal from her mother, not even for a short period of time? Watch Jesus...what do you see?

Now, when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?"¹¹ The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

The whole city was in turmoil. The word for turmoil is actually 'earthquake'. The city was in upheaval - like an earthquake - due to Jesus' arrival. People were shaken. I would like to think it was out of hope and joy for they already knew who He was.

But a city in turmoil was exactly what the Romans didn't want. Dr. Marcus Borg asserts, 'Less well-known is the historical fact that a Roman imperial procession was also entering Jerusalem for Passover from the other (west) side of the city. It

happened every year: the Roman governor of Judea, whose residence was in Caesarea on the coast, rode up to Jerusalem in order to be present in the city in case there were riots at Passover, the most politically volatile of the annual Jewish festivals. With him came soldiers and cavalry to reinforce the imperial garrison in Jerusalem.^{’iii}

How does Pilate enter the city? In scripture, Kings came riding war horses; not donkeys. They came with their armies and spears. In a moment they could put down a person, humiliate and intimidate anyone they wished. You didn’t speak back to a King.

They rule with efficiency. Stop the imposter immediately. Keep people behind the fences. Don’t let them approach.

On the surface this kind of power feels stable. But right underneath the surface is fear and the feeling of walking on egg shells. It sure is another kind of power...

This was Rome’s oppression of the people. And the religious authorities felt it acutely! If the Jews got out of line, then Pilate would come down on them and their whole way of life could be threatened. We will see as the week unfolds that they too, must stop this popular rabbi at all costs. Friday is coming...

Watch Jesus. What kind of reign is His kingship about?

People of God, Jesus riding this quiet donkey is who He has always been. He is humble of heart. He loves the people. He cries when they cry and laughs when they laugh. Jesus, the Savior King rules with gentle hope and unending mercy. His consistency is His steadiness. His love covers all His actions even as He allows people to be who they are.

Are you feeling weary? Weary of the anxious narratives that dominate our eyes, ears, hearts and minds? Disillusioned from each new blog or video telling you how to change your life for the better? Tired of every media outlet and pundit offering their opinion? The noise is deafening...from the army’s march to the endless voices offering empty solutions.

This week – watch Jesus. Turn off the TV. Focus on His life and how it ends. Read the Passion story in any of the Gospels. Here is hope. Here is God! Here is the kind of power which transforms lives each and every day. They may crucify our Savior, but it will be love that holds Him there. Power in humility.

Earthquakes of hope. God's Kingdom; the perfect King for our hearts. Hosanna!
Hosanna in the highest! Amen.

ⁱ William Barclay. The Gospel of Matthew: Volume 2. Westminster Press. Philadelphia, PA. 1958. Pg 264.

ⁱⁱ Bill Tesch. Preaching Series. Mt 21:1-11: Jesus's Triumphal Entry (6 of 6) Working Preacher. 2026

ⁱⁱⁱ https://day1.org/articles/5d9b820ef71918cdf20038dc/marcus_borg_holy_week_palm_sunday