

## SCRIPTURE READING FOR PALM SUNDAY - APRIL 2, 2023 @ CAPC OAKLAND

### LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

**The Gospel of Matthew** is the first book of the New Testament of the Bible and one of the three synoptic Gospels. It tells how Israel's Messiah, Jesus, comes to his people (the Jews) but is rejected by them and how, after his resurrection, he sends the disciples to the gentiles instead. Matthew wishes to emphasize that the Jewish tradition should not be lost in a church that was increasingly becoming gentile (non-Jewish). The gospel reflects the struggles and conflicts between the evangelist's community and the other Jews, particularly with its sharp criticism of the scribes and Pharisees with the position that through their rejection of Christ, the Kingdom of God has been taken away from them and given instead to the church.

Traditionally, the gospel has been attributed to the Apostle Matthew, who is described as a tax collector within the text. Most modern scholars hold the gospel was written anonymously by a male Jew in the last quarter of the first century who was familiar with technical legal aspects of scripture. The authorship has been variously dated between AD 40 and AD 85, with most modern scholars favoring the latter date of AD 85.

*mounted on a donkey and on a colt*:: the donkey was an animal symbolic of humility, peace, and David royalty. This quotation is comprised of portions of Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9. Zechariah 9:9-17 speaks of the coming Messianic Ruler of God's People who will bring peace. While mounted not on a war stallion or chariot, but on a donkey – a simple burden of beast, owned by the poor :

<sup>9</sup> Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!  
*See, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

<sup>10</sup> He will cut off the chariot from Ephraim  
and the war horse from Jerusalem;  
and the battle bow shall be cut off,  
and he shall command peace to the nations;  
his dominion shall be from sea to sea  
and from the River to the ends of the earth.”

Was Jesus trying to imitate and invoke this messianic image? Matthew directly quotes this scripture in his telling of the story of Jesus' Triumphal entry into the capital city of Jerusalem.

### Matthew 21:1-11 NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

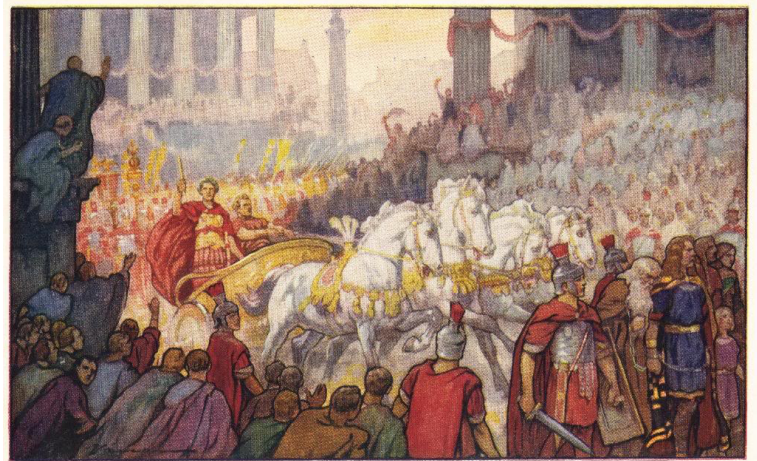
<sup>1</sup> When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will *find a donkey tied and a colt* with her; untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup>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

<sup>5</sup> “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.”

<sup>6</sup> The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; <sup>7</sup> they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup> A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup> 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!”

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



A ROMAN TRIUMPH

**The Roman triumph (triumphus)** was a civil ceremony and religious rite of ancient Rome, held to publicly

celebrate and sanctify the success of a military commander who had led Roman forces to victory in the service of the state or, in some historical traditions, one who had successfully completed a foreign war.

On the day of his triumph, the general wore a crown of laurel and an all-purple, gold-embroidered triumphal toga, regalia that identified him as near-divine or near-kingly. The general rode in a four-horse chariot through the streets of Rome in unarmed procession with his army, captives, and the spoils of his war.

The entry of Jesus into the capital city of Jerusalem as Lord (*kyrios* in Greek) echoes or mocks? The Roman triumph of generals into the capital city of Rome as Lords (*kyrios* in Greek)

Isaiah 62 – also quoted by Matthew here - speaks of the vindication and salvation of Zion: the people of God.

<sup>10</sup> Go through, go through the gates; prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway; clear it of stones; lift up an ensign over the peoples. <sup>11</sup> The Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth: *Say to daughter Zion, "Look, your savior comes; his reward is with him and his recompense before him."*<sup>12</sup> They shall be called, "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the Lord," and you shall be called, "Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken."

The story is told by Matthew on 2 levels simultaneously. On one level the story seems random, unpredictable. The disciples are sent to find animals haphazardly wherever they may be. The owner of the animals would have every reason to abject. On the second level, there is the steady, undeterred unfolding of the will of God. Everything happening is occurring according to divine plan, even if Jesus seems to be the victim of powers beyond his control. At Both levels "Jesus is among the humble righteous, who, in contrast to the oppressive and powerful wicked, trust God to manifest God's reign over the wicked by restoring just structures and access to resources."

*branches*:: branches were part of the celebration when Jerusalem is liberated from the Gentiles ("<sup>51</sup> On the twenty-third day of the second month, in the one hundred seventy-first year, the Jews entered Jerusalem with praise and *palm branches*, and with harps and cymbals and stringed instruments, and with hymns and songs, because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel." - 1 Maccabees 13:51), and when Judas Maccabeus rededicates and re-purifies the temple after ending the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes ("7 Therefore, carrying ivy-wreathed wands and beautiful *branches* and also *palm fronds*, the people of Israel offered hymns of thanksgiving to the LORD who had given success to the purifying of God's own holy place." - 2 Maccabees 10:7)

**HOSANNA**:: Hosanna is often translated "Please Save Us." It is a Greek word "ὡσαννά" [Hosanna] that most scholars believe is the transliteration of two Hebrew words- *עֲשֵׂה*- "yasha" which means "TO SAVE OR DELIVER" and *אָנָּה* – "anna" which means "PLEASE, I BESEECH." Other scholars believe its Hebrew roots come from a different verb tense of "yasha" *עֲשֵׂה* which means to cause or to bring about salvation. In this tense, hosanna becomes a command to bring about or cause salvation.

The crowd shouts a citation from Psalm 118:15-16: "<sup>25</sup> SAVE US, WE BESEECH YOU, O Lord! O LORD, WE BESEECH YOU, give us success! <sup>26</sup> Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord."

**Who is this?** :: This wondering of the identity of Jesus punctuates the gospel story in ; and in particular in Matthew 16:13-16: "<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, *'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?'* <sup>14</sup> And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist but others Elijah and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' <sup>15</sup> He said to them, *"But who do you say that I am?"* <sup>16</sup> Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah.'"

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- Which version of Jesus do we see in the triumph parade? A militaristic victor; or a humble supervise? How is your faith shaped by the version of Jesus that you follow?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?