

**Shout Hosanna to your King!  
He rides on a beast of burden to free you from your burdens**

*<sup>1</sup>As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, <sup>2</sup>saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. <sup>3</sup>If anyone says anything to you, tell him that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away." <sup>4</sup>This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: <sup>5</sup>"Say to the Daughter of Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' " <sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. <sup>7</sup>They brought the donkey and the colt, placed their cloaks on them, and Jesus sat on them. <sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" "Hosanna in the highest!" <sup>10</sup>When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, "Who is this?" <sup>11</sup>The crowds answered, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."*

A guest is coming to your home tonight. How will you prepare? Depends on who's coming. If it is a friend stopping by for chips, dip and a beer to watch the basketball game, you may not do much at all. But let's say it's a special guest, General Petraeus, President Bush, your favorite movie star or professional sports player... then you might be inclined to vacuum the carpet, sweep and mop the floors, wash the dishes, dust, put clean sheets on the guest bed, pull out fresh towels in the bathroom. You would do what you could to make your special guest feel welcome. There's an old M.A.S.H. episode where the camp is informed that General Douglas MacArthur himself will be visiting. The episode shows the members of the camp doing their best to spruce up so that they might impress the general. In the end the general doesn't even stop to visit but merely salutes the camp as he whizzes by in his jeep, only to see Klinger on the outskirts of the camp in, what is probably his most outrageous outfit, Lady Liberty, complete with fireworks sparkling from his torch.

This morning in our lesson from St. Matthew the residents of Jerusalem were all excited. It was Sunday, the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Nisan. This was the first month of the Jewish calendar. On this day the Hebrews were commanded by the LORD to choose paschal lamb; the animal that would be slaughtered four days later at twilight to celebrate the feast of the Passover (Ex 12:3). But the citizens of Jerusalem along with all the pilgrims who were packed in the city were more excited, because they heard that Jesus, the great prophet from Nazareth, would be arriving into town that day.

To welcome this special guest the people ran out of the city walls and greeted Jesus as he came down the Mount of Olives. The crowd threw down their outer coats on the ground so that the feet of the animal which carried him would not touch the bare earth. They ran

to cut palm branches from the trees, lying them on the ground and waving them in the air; a symbol of victory. They greeted him with shouts of, “**Hosanna to the Son of David!**” Hosanna means, “Save!” or “Help!” In other words they were chanting, “May God help the Son of David succeed!” By their shouts of acclamation this crowd acknowledged the fact that this Jesus could possibly be the Messiah descended from King David’s throne. But we have to understand their perception of the Messiah. Scripture tells us that at this time not even the disciples understood what Jesus’ role as Messiah was (John 12:16). The Jews understood from the Old Testament that the Christ would bring peace to his people and would set his people free from captivity. They interpreted these Scriptures to mean the Messiah would remove the burden of the Roman government. He certainly had the power to do so. He had called Lazarus from his tomb not too long ago. The stories of his miraculous acts of healing and his authority over demons were well-known all over the Judean countryside.

But look how he makes his grand entrance into the city! Not on a horse as a mighty warrior king who would bring destruction, but on a meek pack animal, a donkey, symbolic of a king who brings peace. It is easy to see why the attitude of this crowd quickly turned against Jesus just five days later in the courtyard of Pilate as they all chanted, “Crucify! Crucify!” What kind of powerful ruler would allow himself to be captured by the empire he was to defeat? How embarrassing! The Messiah would not allow this to happen to himself! In their eyes Jesus of Nazareth deserved to be crucified. He was no longer welcome in their city, so they put him outside the city walls and nail him to a tree. He was no longer welcome in their hearts or lives.

This morning we at Faith Lutheran, like the citizens of Jerusalem 2,000 years ago, welcomed Jesus with palm branches waving. We welcomed our King with our songs of Hosanna. We welcome Jesus by paying special attention to his Word as it is read. With heartfelt repentance we are eager to welcome Christ as he comes down to us from heaven through his Holy Supper and grants us forgiveness.

Are we always eager to welcome Jesus when he rides into our church through his Word and Sacrament? Are we always excited to welcome Jesus into our homes and at our dinner tables? Or are there places we don’t want him welcome: on the couch with us in front of our TV sets, video games stations or computer screen; next to our desk as we fill out our tax forms, standing next to us at a party or on a date? Do we enthusiastically welcome him to guide us as we balance our checkbooks and determine how we want to thank our God for all his blessings to us? Or do we say, “You’re not welcome here, Jesus. I’ll welcome you when I’m at church, or when I am in need or hurting.” When we have this attitude toward our Messiah we are among those standing in the crowd yelling, “Crucify!” But it was for these very sins that Jesus rode into Jerusalem that first Palm Sunday.

What a fitting day, a day on which the paschal lamb was chosen to be sacrificed. So also, the true Paschal Lamb that was carried by a beast of burden, would later be the Lamb who carried burden of the sins of the world to the cross. Jesus was the Messiah who had come to Jerusalem to free his people from their oppression. It just wasn’t the freedom they were wishing for. They should have looked at the more important burden they

needed to be released from, their spiritual slavery. By birth we too were held in bondage by our own sins and death.

It was for this very reason that the King of kings rode into the Holy City on a beast of burden, so that he could carry the weight of the world's sin, your sins and my sins. As Jesus hung on the cross he cried out in pain. He could feel the weight of his body pull on his arms and shoulders. But Jesus also cried out because he felt the weight of your sins heavy on his soul. It appeared as he hung his head and died that his enemy, sin, had overcome him. But it was through this humiliation that Jesus defeated his enemies and set you free from your burden of sin. He took that burden on himself so you would not have to. It appeared that his enemy, death, had won. But three days later Jesus proved to be victorious, removing the burden of death from you. Why would Christ take upon himself a burden that you and I deserved to bear? It was love for sinners that caused Christ to bear your burden for you.

As his holy Law points out our sins, we, with sincere sorrow in repentance and faith cry out to the only one who can and did save us, "**Hosanna to the Son of David!** *Son of David, save us from our sins!* **Hosanna in the highest!** *Lord in heaven, hear our prayer!*" At times you feel the oppression of your sins, guilt that weighs heavy on your heart, because you know you did wrong and those thoughts terrorize you and consume you with so much grief and you despair. In faith and trust look to your King and cry out, "Save me!" When you gather for public worship he releases you from the burden of that guilt through his Means of Grace. This morning he came to you through his Word and you already heard, "**He humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!**" (Phil 2:8) This morning your King already reminded you of the Sacrament of your Baptism. Did you catch it? When your pastor baptized you, he made the sign of the cross on your head and heart to mark you as a child of God. Every time you see your pastor make the sign of the cross the Holy Spirit reminds you of that day when your pastor poured water on your head and spoke Christ's powerful words that washed all your sins away. When you feel unworthy because of your sins cry out "Save me!" and run to the altar. Through his wonderful heavenly supper your King says to you, "Here is my body and blood which I offered in your place. Eat and drink and leave with a heart at peace. You have been released from the tyranny of sin that burdens you!" When you face temptations that seem to always get the best of you, cry out, "Save me!" The LORD promises that those who run to him will find shelter in shadow of his wings (Ps 91:4). Your King also promises to provide a way out (1Cor 10:13). When you feel weak and troubled in your faith, cry out, "Save me!" The LORD in Isaiah 40:29-31 promises to give strength to the weary, to increase the power of the weak for those who hope in the LORD. My dear friends, when you feel the burden of your sins, allow your King to come to you through his Word and Sacraments to strengthen you and release you from that burden.

Not only does your King release you from the spiritual burdens, but also your emotional and physical load. Maybe you are facing the demons of depression. Cry out, "Save me!" Your King releases you from your thoughts of worthlessness and self pity by reminding you how much you are worth to him. In the Lord's Supper he comes to you personally to

reassure you, dear sinner, that you are his forgiven child, through his death on the cross. Maybe you will have to face serious surgery. Cry out, "Save me!" Your King does by reminding you that he will never leave you nor will he ever forsake you (Heb 13:5). Maybe you will have to grieve the death of a loved one. Cry out, "Save me!" Your King promises to comfort you (2Cor 1). He does so through his Words, "**He who believes in me will live, even though he dies.**" (John 11:25,26) Maybe you are faced with making a difficult decision that will affect your family. Then cry out, "Save me!" The LORD promises you, "**Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.**" (1Pet 5:7) He promises that he **will guide you by the hand** (Ps 23, 139:10). And finally when you draw your last breath, cry out, "Save me!" Your King has done that already, hasn't he? When he breathed his last he cried out, "**Father, into your hands I commend my spirit!**" You, too, when you face death, will commit your soul to the care of your Father. He himself rose from the grave and promises you that you will rise from your icy grave to live forever with your King. (1Cor 15, John 11:25,26). Next Sunday we will celebrate our King's victory over our burden of death and thank him for the wonderful reception that he's preparing for us in heaven, to be his guest.

Speaking of wonderful receptions... this past January, the country of Israel spent over \$400,000 for a visit from President Bush. The President and his entourage occupied 2/3 of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. Israel used 1/3 of their entire police force to block off roads, direct traffic, and even flew in special armor plated limousines. Said the chief of police, "It's not everyday a president comes to visit Jerusalem."

It's not everyday that the King of kings rides into Jerusalem. But he does not arrive with a huge entourage showing might and force, but a small band of disciples. He does not cruise in a shiny bullet proof limo. Instead he sits on a beast of burden, humble and meek, to bring peace. He comes to carry the burden of your sin so that you will never have to. He comes to release you from death so that you can live with him forever.

For that we shout, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest! Amen!"