

SOBORNOST

St. Thomas the Apostle Orthodox Church



SERVICES
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April 12, 2020 | Palm Sunday

On the Sunday before the Feast of Great and Holy Pascha and at the beginning of Holy Week, the Orthodox Church celebrates one of its most joyous feasts of the year. Palm Sunday is the commemoration of the Entrance of our Lord into Jerusalem following His glorious miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. Having anticipated His arrival and having heard of the miracle, the people went out to meet the Lord and welcomed Him with displays of honor and shouts of praise. On this day, we receive and worship Christ in this same manner, acknowledging Him as our King and Lord.

The biblical story of Palm Sunday is recorded in all four of the Gospels (Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:28-38; and John 12:12-18). Five days before the Passover, Jesus came from Bethany to Jerusalem. Having sent two of His disciples to bring Him a colt of a donkey, Jesus sat upon it and entered the city.

People had gathered in Jerusalem for the Passover and were looking for Jesus, both because of His great works and teaching and because they had heard of the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus. When they heard that Christ was entering the city, they went out to meet Him with palm branches, laying their garments on the ground before Him, and shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is he that comes in the Name of the Lord, the King of Israel!"

At the outset of His public ministry Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and announced that the powers of the age to come were already active in the present age (Luke 7:18-22). His words and mighty works were performed "to produce repentance as the response to His call, a call to an inward change of mind and heart which would result in concrete changes in one's life, a call to follow Him and accept His messianic destiny. The triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem is a messianic event, through which His divine authority was declared.

Palm Sunday summons us to behold our king: the Word of God made flesh. We are called to behold Him not simply as the One who came to us once riding on a colt, but as the One who is always present in His Church, coming ceaselessly to us in power and glory at every Eucharist, in every prayer and sacrament, and in every act of love, kindness and mercy. He comes to free us from all our fears and insecurities, "to take solemn possession of our soul, and to be enthroned in our heart," as someone has said. He comes not only to deliver us from our deaths by His death and Resurrection, but also to make us capable of attaining the most perfect fellowship or union with Him. He is the King, who liberates us from the darkness of sin and the bondage of death. Palm Sunday summons us to behold our King: the vanquisher of death and the giver of life.

Palm Sunday summons us to accept both the rule and the kingdom of God as the goal and content of our Christian life. We draw our identity from Christ and His kingdom. The kingdom is Christ - His indescribable power, boundless mercy and incomprehensible abundance given freely to man. The kingdom does not lie at some point or place in the distant future. In the words of the Scripture, the kingdom of God is not only at hand (Matthew 3:2; 4:17), it is within us (Luke 17:21). The kingdom is a present reality as well as a future realization (Matthew 6:10). St. Theophan the Recluse wrote the following words about the inward rule of Christ the King:

“The Kingdom of God is within us when God reigns in us, when the soul in its depths confesses God as its Master, and is obedient to Him in all its

powers. Then God acts within it as master 'both to will and to do of his good pleasure' (Philippians 2:13). This reign begins as soon as we resolve to serve God in our Lord Jesus Christ, by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Then the Christian hands over to God his consciousness and freedom, which comprises the essential substance of our human life, and God accepts the sacrifice; and in this way the alliance of man with God and God with man is achieved, and the covenant with God, which was severed by the Fall and continues to be severed by our willful sins, is re-established."

The kingdom of God is the life of the Holy Trinity in the world. It is the kingdom of holiness, goodness, truth, beauty, love, peace and joy. These qualities are not works of the human spirit. They proceed from the life of God and reveal God. Christ Himself is the kingdom. He is the God-Man, Who brought God down to earth (John 1:1,14). "He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, yet the world knew Him not. He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not" (John 1:10-11). He was reviled and hated.

Palm Sunday summons us to behold our king - the Suffering Servant. We cannot understand Jesus' kingship apart from the Passion. Filled with infinite love for the Father and the Holy Spirit, and for creation, in His inexpressible humility Jesus accepted the infinite abasement of the Cross. He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows; He was wounded for our transgressions and made Himself an offering for sin (Isaiah 53). His glorification, which was accomplished by the resurrection and the ascension, was achieved through the Cross.

In the fleeting moments of exuberance that marked Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the world received its King, the king who was on His way to death. His Passion, however, was no morbid desire for martyrdom. Jesus' purpose was to accomplish the mission for which the Father sent Him.

"The Son and Word of the Father, like Him without beginning and eternal, has come today to the city of Jerusalem, seated on a dumb beast, on a foal. From fear the cherubim dare not gaze upon Him; yet the children honor Him with palms and branches, and mystically they sing a hymn of praise: 'Hosanna in the highest, Hosanna to the Son of David, who has come to save from error all mankind.'" (A hymn of the Light.)

"With our souls cleansed and in spirit carrying branches, with faith let us sing Christ's praises like the children, crying with a loud voice to the Master: Blessed art Thou, O Savior, who hast come into the world to save Adam from the ancient curse; and in Thy love for mankind Thou hast been pleased to become spiritually the new Adam. O Word, who hast ordered all things for our good, glory to Thee." (A Sessional hymn of the Orthros)

In the Icon of the Feast of Palm Sunday, Christ is the central figure, depicted seated upon the colt of a donkey as He enters Jerusalem, a fulfillment of the prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9. Christ is blessing with His right hand, and in His left hand is a scroll, symbolizing that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah, the Anointed One who has come to redeem us from our sins and break the power of death. The colt, one of the animals that were considered unclean according to the Law, is symbolic of the inclusion of all peoples of all nations in the new covenant that will come through the death and Resurrection of Christ (Isaiah 62:10-11). It is also a sign that our Lord has revealed a heavenly and spiritual kingdom that offers true and enduring peace. On the right, the disciples accompany Jesus in His Triumphal Entry. Depicted on the left are the Jews who greet Him crying “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!” The word “Hosanna” means “Save, I pray” or “Save now.” The children are the small people who are greeting Christ with palm branches and laying these and their garments on the ground before Christ as tokens of honor for one who is acknowledged as a King. The city of Jerusalem is shown as the walled buildings, and the temple is depicted as the building with the dome. Palm Sunday is celebrated with the Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, which is preceded by the Matins service. A Great Vespers is conducted on Saturday evening according to the order prescribed in the Triodion. On this Sunday, in addition to the Divine Liturgy, the Church observes the Blessing and Distribution of the Palms. A basket containing the woven palm crosses is placed on a table in front of the icon of the Lord, which is on the Iconostasis. The prayer for the blessing of the Palms is found in the Euxologion. According to the rubrics of the Typikon, this prayer is read at the Orthros just before the Psalms of Praise. The palms are then distributed to the faithful. In many places today, the prayer is said at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy. The text of the prayer, however, indicates clearly that it is less a prayer for the blessing of the palms, even though that is its title, and more a blessing upon those, who in imitation of the New Testament event hold palms in their hands as symbols of Christ's victory and as signs of a virtuous Christian life. It appears then, that it would be more correct to have the faithful hold the palms in their hands during the course of the Divine Liturgy when the Church celebrates both the presence and the coming of the Lord in the mystery of the Eucharist. *(from goarch.org)*

Troparion, in Tone 1: O Christ our God, You confirmed the resurrection of all * before the time of Your Passion by raising Lazarus from the dead. * Therefore, we as the children of Israel carry the symbols of victory * and cry out to You, the Conqueror of death: * “Hosanna in the highest! * Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Troparion, in Tone 4: We have been buried with You through baptism, O Christ our God, * and we have become worthy of immortal life by Your Resurrection. * So we cry out to You: * “Hosanna in the highest! * Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord!”

Kontakion, in Tone 6: In heaven You are carried upon a throne; * on earth You rode upon a colt,) Christ our God. * You received the praise of angels and the hymns of children crying out to You: * “Blessed is He Who came to restore Adam.” (*Note that this comes from the Kontakion composed by St. Romanos the Melodist for Palm Sunday; see below – Ed.*)

Today’s Epistle Lesson – St. Paul’s Letter to the Philippians 4:4-9

Brethren, rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord *is* at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things *are* noble, whatever things *are* just, whatever things *are* pure, whatever things *are* lovely, whatever things *are* of good report, if *there is* any virtue and if *there is* anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

Today’s Gospel Lesson – Saint John 12:1-18

At that time, six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was who had been dead, whom He had raised from the dead. There they made Him a supper; and Martha served, but Lazarus was one of those who sat at the table with Him. Then Mary took a pound of very costly oil of spikenard, anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped His feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. But one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon’s *son*, who would betray Him, said, “Why was this fragrant oil not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?” This he said, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the money box; and he used to take what was put in it. But Jesus said, “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.”

Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus’ sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus.

The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out: “Hosanna! ‘Blessed *is* He who comes in the name of the Lord!’ The King of Israel!” Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: “Fear not, daughter of Zion; behold, your King is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt.” His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about Him and *that* they had done these things to Him. Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign.

A Word From the Holy Fathers

Proemium 1 Mounted on the throne in heaven, Christ God, and on the colt on earth, You accepted the praise of the angels and the hymn of the children Who cried to you, ‘You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam.’

Proemium 2 At first the ungrateful Jews with branches praised Christ God, Later with staves arrested him. But as with faith unchanging we ever honor him as Benefactor, Let us cry to him, ‘You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam.’

Since you bound Hell, slew Death and raised the world, With palms the infants praised you, O Christ, as victor, Crying out to you to-day, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David. For no more’, they say, ‘will infants be slaughtered because of Mary’s babe, But for all, infants and elders, you alone are crucified. No more against us will the sword advance, For your side will be pierced by a lance. Therefore we rejoice and say, ‘You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam.’”

Behold our King, meek and gentle, seated on the colt Draws near with haste to suffer and to cut off the passions; The Word upon an irrational beast wishing to deliver rational creatures; And it was possible to see on the back of a colt the One who rides on the shoulders of the Cherubim, Who once took up Elias in a fiery chariot, He who is rich by nature making himself poor by design, And weak by intention, he who empowers All those who cry to him, ‘You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam.’

All Sion was shaken as once Egypt was. There the inanimate, But here the animate were shaken as you came, O Savior, Not because you are fomenter of trouble—for you are the sower of peace—But because you abolish, as Maker of all things, all the trickery of the foe, Driving him from everywhere as you reign in every place. Their idols fell down of old, And now those who favor them are shaken As they

hear the voices of infants, 'You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam.'

'Who is this?' they said, who deliberately did not know you. For it says they did not know Who was the son of David who had delivered them from corruption. They are still untying Lazarus and do they not know who raised him? The shoulders of those who carried the widow's son are still hurting, And do they really not know who it was snatched him from death? They have not yet left Jairus's courtyard, And do they not know who it was gave his daughter life? They do know, but do not want to say 'You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam.'

Ungrateful, lawless, they welcomed ignorance, indeed were ignorant. The one they were plotting to kill they did not know, the sons of falsehood! What they say is not strange. They are repeating the past. Moses led them out of Egypt; he was immediately denied by them. And Christ, who saved them from death, was now unknown. They did not know Moses, those who knew the calf. They denied Christ, the friends of Beliar. Then it was 'What has happened?' But now they said, 'Who is this Who comes to call back Adam?'

With palms infants sing your praise, calling you Son of David rightly, Master; For it was you who slew the Mocker, the spiritual Goliath. David the dancing maidens extolled after his victory, 'Saul slew them in thousands and David in ten thousands'. That is: the Law, and after it your Grace, my Jesu. The Law was Saul, envying and persecuting, But David persecuted, sprouted grace, For you are David's Son and Lord, Who comes to call back Adam.

The sun is a chariot of light, and, resplendent as a carriage, it is enslaved to you, And it is subject to your command as Creator and God. And now a colt was your delight. I worship your compassion, Since once for me you were laid in a manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes, And now you are mounted on a colt, who have the heaven as your throne. There the angels encircled the manger, Here disciples held the colt. 'Glory' you heard then, and now, 'You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam.'

You showed your strength in choosing penury, since for you to be seated on a foal Is a form of beggary. But in glory you shake Sion. The disciples' garments signified penury, But the sign of your might was the hymn of the children and the gathering of the crowd Crying 'Hosanna'—that is 'Save now'—'in the highest'. Most High, save the humbled; Have mercy on us, as you look on our branches. Boughs that are brandished will move your compassion, the one Who comes to call back Adam.

Adam contracted for us the debt that we owe, by eating what he ought not, And until to-day it is demanded of us who are descended from him. The creditor was

not satisfied with seizing the debtor, But he attacks his children too, demanding the ancestral debt, and as he drags out all of them, he would empty completely the house of the debtor. Therefore, insofar as possible let us flee for refuge, since we know that we are indeed poor, and that You are Yourself a return of what we owe. You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam.

You came to save all men, and as witness there is Your prophet, Zacharias; he once called You most gentle, just, and the One who saves. We were weary, we were defeated, and we were everywhere driven away. We thought that we had the law as ransom; but the law enslaved us. Once more we thought we had the prophets; and they sent us away with hope. And so, we with our children fall at Your knees; take pity on us who have been cast down; voluntarily be crucified and tear up the written decree. You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam.

"O clay, molded by my hand," the Modeler answered those who cry out: "Knowing that the law was not strong enough to save you, I have come. It was not possible for the law to save you, since it did not fashion you; nor was it possible for the prophets, since they, too, are of my fashioning, like you. It is for me alone to free you from your debt, your very heavy debt. I am to be sold in exchange for you, and I shall free you; I am to be crucified for you, and you will not die. I die, and I teach you to cry: 'You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam'."

"I was not content with the angels, was I? I loved you, the beggars; I hid my glory; and voluntarily I, the wealthy, became poor, because I yearn for you very much. For you I hungered and suffered thirst and hardships. On the mountains and beetling crags and in the woody glens I came seeking for you, the wandering. I was called shepherd, in order that, charming you by my voice in some way, I might lead you. And as shepherd, I wish to lay my life down for you, in order that I may pluck you from the grasp of the wolf. I suffer all things, wishing you to cry: 'You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam'."

After these words of Christ, the official business was made clear; for before He reached the city, the hymn of the children terrified all of his enemies. Lifting up His eyes, He fixed His gaze steadily on Zion - and composing a dirge over it, He cried: "Mourn, O Jerusalem, since you have found children, your sons, the teachers of their fathers. You act the younger of the two in =evil and depravity, and in your old age you are weary of well-doing. Better than you are those who cry out: 'You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam'."

"Now I enter in the city, and casting you out, I shall reject you - not that I hate you, but because I discovered that you hated me and mine. IN return for what did you children contrive a cross for me? Was it in return for the fact that for them I broke through the sea as though it were a cloak with my staff? Do they quarry a tomb for me in return for my offering them a cloud as shelter? Indeed, I rejoice, since I

have come for their sakes; and I am content to suffer, since I yearn over the fallen so that those who love me say: 'You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam!.'

Thus He who sees the slow of heart, rebuking the things in their hearts, came into the city along with the children - the priest of everyone in the temple, the Son arrived in the dwelling of His Father; and He cast out those who were buying and selling nearby, saying: "Let nothing of all this remain, for we depart from here - I and my Father and the Holy Spirit; for we now prepared a home for the weak, the goal of those who faithfully cry out to me; 'You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam.'

O son of God, all Holy, number us among those who sing hymns to You, and receive the prayers of Your servants as of Your children just now. Take pity on those whom You have fashioned, for love of whom You sojourned here. Grant peace to Your churches, which are disturbed by enemies, and grant to me, O Savior, remission of my sins. Afford me the power to speak what You wish as You wish it. Let not suffering make me sluggish of mind. Teach me to cry out the beautifully wrought salutation: "You are the blessed One who comes to call back Adam." - St. Romanos the Melodist, *Kontakion on the Sunday of Palms*

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