

What kind of God would enter the world as a helpless baby? What kind of God would make a “triumphal” entrance into the Holy City by riding on a donkey? What kind of God would submit to death on a cross?

The kind of God who values **humility** above bravado; the kind of God who **came to serve** and not *to be* served; the kind of God who **suffers** alongside humanity; “this is our God, the servant King” ...and here he is, coming into the city *on a donkey*.

I’ve seen a few parades in my time. Crowds gather along the streets in great anticipation. Giant colorful floats on wagons slowly making their way into view. Marching bands and military processions. Jugglers on stilts and giant balloons. It’s all very exciting!

I wonder about *that* crowd, gathered around Jesus as he made his “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem. Expectations were so high! They honored Jesus by spreading cloaks and palm branches all along the road as he came in on the back of a donkey.

These days we wouldn’t expect a character in a parade to process on a modest donkey. But this mode of transportation held great meaning for the Jews. It was prophesied: “your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on a donkey.” The Jews knew this prophecy from the book of Zechariah, written some 500 years before Jesus was born.

Jesus, riding on a donkey, was ushered into Jerusalem in a parade of palm leaves and cloaks and shouts of “Hosanna.” Fulfilment of prophecy, and a sign of the identity of Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Jesus knows he will face conflict in Jerusalem. He was aiming to confront the leadership of the “system” but he wasn’t going to wage violence or put up a fight. The crowd expected a warrior to rescue them from systemic oppression and corruption, but what did eventually come through Jesus was a far more liberating event.

Today marks the beginning of Holy Week. As the story moves forward, this Thursday we will remember the event of the Last Supper, when Jesus speaks the sacramental words over the bread and wine, words that we still use to this day in our Communion service: “This is my body...”; “this is my blood...”

Later, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus begins to feel overwhelmed, and we witness his humanity as he prays, “Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me – yet not as I will, but as you will.”

On Good Friday, we’ll meditate on the Stations of the Cross, the journey that Christ willingly took to set us free from sin and death.

Holy Week marks the last days in the life of Christ and ends at Easter when we celebrate **the Resurrection** – the vindicating proof of God’s desire to reconcile humanity to God – the beginning of a *new way* of being human: in relationship *with* God.

As Jesus entered Jerusalem, the people of the city were said to be in turmoil, wondering “Who is this?” The crowd had an answer – that Jesus was a prophet. They didn’t yet know the full story.

God’s reign of love was shown when Jesus came as a helpless babe into the world. God’s reign of love was shown when Jesus rode into the Holy City on a donkey. And God’s reign of love was shown when Jesus submitted to death on a cross, once for all. Then Christ rose again – the first born over all creation.

We can be thankful as we celebrate Palm Sunday today - even in the midst of this awful pandemic – because *we know* who Jesus is: our servant King, our humble Lord, and our suffering Savior.

I’d like to finish with a prayer written by Angela Ashwin for this day. *Let us pray:*

Jesus, Lord of the Journey, we thank you that you set your face firmly towards Jerusalem, with a single eye and pure intention, knowing what lay ahead but never turning aside.

Jesus, Lord of the Palms, we thank you that you enjoyed the Hallelujahs of ordinary people, living fully in that moment of delight and accepting their praise.

Jesus, Lord of the Cross, we thank you that you went into the heart of our evil and pain, along a way that was both terrible and wonderful, as your kingship became your brokenness and your dying became love’s triumph. Amen.