

*As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, <sup>2</sup> saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and just as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. <sup>3</sup> If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ tell him, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.’ ”*

*<sup>4</sup> They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, <sup>5</sup> some people standing there asked, “What are you doing, untying that colt?” <sup>6</sup> They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go. <sup>7</sup> When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. <sup>8</sup> Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. <sup>9</sup> Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted,*

*“Hosanna!”*

*“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

*<sup>10</sup> “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!”*

*“Hosanna in the highest!”*

*<sup>11</sup> Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve. (Mark 11:1-10)*

### **Jesus’ Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem was no Accident**

Have you ever seen that famous picture of Douglas MacArthur landing on the beach in the Philippines? It’s one of the most famous pictures of World War II. Two years earlier, the Japanese had forced MacArthur to flee the Philippines and he had promised, “I shall return.” That picture came to symbolize the fulfillment of his promise. But did you know that there’s a lot of controversy about it? Some people have charged that the whole thing was staged. If you go on line, you’ll see a number of different explanations for that picture, everything from it being authentic, taken on the day he arrived, to being a replay for the camera done a couple days later on another beach, to being a photo of a completely different landing that has long been mistaken for the one in the Philippines. Even those who claim it’s authentic often state that it wasn’t supposed to happen that way. MacArthur was supposed to be let off at a dock, but none was available and supposedly, he was furious that he had to walk through the water to the beach. Whatever the truth is, the triumphant arrival recorded in that photograph apparently didn’t come off the way it was planned. History is full of that kind of thing. Very few great moments in history really came off the way the people who planned them thought they would. This morning, we have gathered to celebrate one of the truly great moments in history. Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem has fascinated Christians for almost two thousand years. It’s been reenacted in countless processions on countless Palm Sundays all around the world. Almost every movie ever made about Jesus includes this scene. But unlike so many moments in history, **Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem was no accident.**

#### **I.**

It was meant to happen, exactly when and where and how it happened. And this morning we see some of the planning that went into it. Jesus arrived at two twin villages on the Mount of Olives. You could think of these villages as suburbs of Jerusalem. Jesus sent two of his disciples into the village of Bethphage with very specific instructions. Just as they entered the town they would find a colt tied up. They were to untie that colt and bring it to Jesus. He even told them what to say if anyone challenged them – and lo and behold, someone did! They answered exactly as Jesus told them to, and those people let them take the colt and go.

Was this part of an arrangement Jesus had made? Did this colt belong to a follower of Jesus who was waiting for the disciples to come and say the words Jesus told them to? Or was this a miracle – Jesus just knew what they would find and when they spoke the words he gave them, the owners simply let the disciples go because that’s what God had decided? I think it could either way. Either way you look at it, Jesus planned for this day. He had chosen this moment, when Jerusalem was filled with visitors for the Passover, to make this

dramatic entrance. And he had chosen this colt to ride from Bethphage and he sent his disciples to get it. So whether he arranged this in advance or simply used his power as the Son of God to do a miracle, he planned to come at this time and in this way.

But a longer range plan than that prepared for this event. As Jesus came into Jerusalem, a crowd of those Passover visitors gathered. They began to throw their clothes in his way and to cut palm branches and lay them in the road before Jesus. These were ways to honor him. It was kind of like rolling out a red carpet. His stead would not touch the ground. The crowd welcomed Jesus as a king – not just any king. They welcome him as the Messiah King. You see that in what they shouted. Mark records it this way: **“Hosanna!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest!”** Two of those shouts came from an Old Testament prophecy recorded in Psalm 118. *Hosanna* is an Aramaic expression that means “Save us!” In Jewish tradition, another festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, includes a procession in which the people wave palm branches and shout “Hosanna!” In Psalm 118, the Hosanna is a cry for the Messiah to rescue his people from sin and death and from all that this life does to us. For that reason, the other cry which also comes from Psalm 118 was part of what Jesus heard that day: **“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”** Centuries before Jesus was born, God gave his people these words to include in one of their favorite hymns. Traditionally, Psalm 118 is the last hymn sung at the end of the Passover meal, when the people are focused on waiting for that Messiah to come.

The people also shouted. **“Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!” “Hosanna in the highest!”** Those two shouts are not in the psalm. But they show how the people understood the prophecy and the entrance of Christ. He was from the highest – God was sending him there to save them. He was coming as the Son of David to restore the true kingdom of God. Now the people that day probably didn’t really understand the true meaning of that coming of the kingdom. Even the disciples didn’t understand that until after Jesus rose. But they knew the Messiah was supposed to do that.

Jesus came to fulfill Psalm 118. Centuries before it happened, God planned for this event and he pictured it in the Old Testament and he hard-wired it into the culture and the practices of the Jewish people while they waited. But even that doesn’t go far enough. The truth is, God planned this entrance from eternity. Before the world began, God knew that we would fall into sin. God knew that we would deserve death and hell. So before he ever said, “Let there be light,” God planned for the Messiah King to ride into Jerusalem that day to lay down his life so that our sins are forgiven and we will live with him forever.

So on this day, God was sending a message to his people: all their ancient hopes were about to be fulfilled. In the Garden of Eden, God promised a Savior. To Abraham, two thousand years before this, God promised a Savior. Through Moses fifteen hundred years before this, to King David a thousand years before this, through Isaiah and Micah seven hundred years before this, through Jeremiah 600 years before this, through Malachi 400 years before this and then through John the Baptist three years before this, God promised to send the Savior they needed. Now the promise was fulfilled.

My friends, in a world where faith is a miracle and hope is so often a dream that goes unfulfilled, God kept his promise. God sent the one man who could rescue his people and establish the true kingdom of God. And God didn’t just send him to Israel. Part of the miracle of Christ is that you don’t have to have Jewish blood to be a true Israelite. You don’t have to be descended from Abraham to be a part of his people. All you need is to share the faith of Abraham. Abraham and all those other believers who heard all those promises trusted in God and waited for him to fulfill what he had promised. Five days before Jesus died, God announced to the world that all his promises were about to be kept. And he had his people shout “Hosanna!” “Save us!” because that’s what this king rode into Jerusalem to do. My friends, **Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem was no accident. It was planned from eternity.**

## II.

If it’s true that MacArthur faked that landing photo, he did a masterful job. That picture of him coming ashore is so dramatic. It was a politician’s dream photo. That’s what we would expect to be the case for any kind of planned photo op. The person in the picture wants it to make them look good. But that wasn’t high on Jesus’ priorities on Palm Sunday. In fact, the way it came off, a politician would be frustrated by how bad it made him look. Look at the details. Jesus arranges for the disciples to bring him a colt to ride on. Mark doesn’t mention it, but you know what kind of colt it was, right? It was a donkey’s colt. It wasn’t a stallion, like we would think of a king riding on. It was the mount of peasant. You know, you’d think that if Jesus had

planned all this in advance, he could've arranged for a much more noble steed. And look at the saddle he used. Mark tells us that his disciples laid their cloaks on the colt and that's what Jesus sat on. How hard would it have been to come up with a real saddle?

Now, he did time it so that the pilgrims thronging to Jerusalem would accompany him singing and praising him. So we can pass over the fact that he had no armed guard, no secret service agents to protect him, no personal body guard the way that ancient kings did. But the rulers of Jerusalem didn't come out to meet him and present him with a key to the city. They didn't invite to a formal reception afterwards. Jesus marched down to the temple and looked around, and then he went back out to Bethany to spend the night there. He didn't even get a room in one of the great houses in Jerusalem. Every day during that holy week he had to hike back into to town from that suburb.

Jesus rode into town as the true king of Israel. But almost nothing about his triumphant entry comes off as truly royal. This week, in England, they reburied King Richard III. Three years ago, they found his forgotten grave and exhumed him and examined him and this week they reburied him. King Richard has long been considered to be one of the great villains and losers of history. He probably murdered his nephews – who were just kids – so that he could take the throne. Shakespeare wrote a play about him and makes him a terrible individual. He killed a number of family members who got in his way and only reigned for two years before he was killed in battle fighting a revolt. Yet, there was a huge procession to bury him this week. People lined the streets. The highest ranking clergymen in England officiated. It was full of pomp and circumstance – much more than Jesus had. The truth is, the people who welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday, finished the week by shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

But why didn't Jesus do a better job of pulling this off? Because it was supposed to happen this way. The prophet Zechariah, five hundred years before, said that Israel's king would come, gentle and humble, and riding on a donkey's colt. That's exactly what happened. God was making a statement about real power and real glory. It's not where we think it is. Richard III did not have real power. President Obama does not have real power. No king or prince or president of this life can compare with Jesus. He is the true Son of God. He is the ruler of the universe and he will judge the world. But he didn't come to Jerusalem to display that power and glory. He came to lay it all aside. He came to humble himself and to die the most shameful and painful death that the ancient world knew how to give out. He came to be rejected and mocked and tortured. He came to die. That was the sole purpose of this triumphant entry. And God underlined that role by doing something that we really can only consider to be a miracle: he had crowds of people who did not believe in Jesus welcome him as the true Messiah King.

That is indeed what he was. He came into Jerusalem to set us, his true people free from all false ideas of what's important in life, from all false ideas of power and glory. The most important thing about this life is reaching the next one. Jesus came to free us from slavery to sin and pride and false hope so that we get there. Jesus came to conquer death and hell. He did that by dying in our place. Jesus came so that we will spend all eternity with him, rejoicing in the sacrifice he made. Just before the sacrifice began, God called our attention to who was coming in, by this remarkable, upside down, glory of a humble king, of God made man, of victory through suffering and humiliation. **Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem was no accident. It was planned for humility.**

Through that humility, Jesus won glory. Glory for you and for me, the glory of heaven, the glory of being forgiven and called the children of God. Jesus won glory for his Father who sent him to do all this. He won glory for the Holy Spirit who revealed him through the prophets of the Old Testament and the gospel writers of the New. He won glory for himself because he loved us enough to kneel down and die for us. Jesus won. It was a triumphant entry. And it was all part of God's plan to save you and me. Amen.