

# Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church 2021

*Sit comfortably in a quiet place and prepare, start with a brief period of silence, turning your mind and spirit towards God. You may want to have a cross or candle in view as a focus.*

❖ Opening sentences Psalm 118;1-2,19-24

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.  
Let Israel say: "**His love endures forever.**"

Open for me the gates of the righteous;  
**I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.**

This is the gate of the LORD  
**through which the righteous may enter.**

I will give you thanks, for you answered me;  
**you have become my salvation.**

The stone the builders rejected  
**has become the cornerstone;**

the LORD has done this,  
**and it is marvellous in our eyes.**

The LORD has done it this very day;  
**let us rejoice today and be glad.**

❖ Hymn StF 88 Praise to the Lord, the Almighty (Lob den Herren)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= vegvb1u5s4>

❖ Opening Prayers

Loving God,  
we join this day in glad and joyful praise.

We welcome Christ once more  
as our King, Lord, and Saviour -  
we promise him our loyalty,  
we bring him our love,  
we bow to him in worship,  
we greet him with wonder.

Hosanna to the Son of David,  
**glory in the highest heaven.**

Loving God,  
come to us again through Christ this day.  
Speak to us as we read familiar words,  
as we sing familiar songs,  
as we recall his triumphal entry into Jerusalem long ago,  
as we remember all it meant and all it cost.

Hosanna to the Son of David,  
**glory in the highest heaven.**

Help us to see that it was not only in the welcome of Palm Sunday,  
but in the rejection which followed  
that Jesus revealed your glory,  
and so help us to offer him our service in the days ahead,  
through the good times and the bad.

Hosanna to the Son of David,  
**glory in the highest heaven,**

now and for evermore.  
**Amen.**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
you came to Jerusalem and were greeted by shouts of joy,  
welcomed as God's promised deliverer,  
the one he had chosen to rescue his people.

But when the nature of your kingdom became clear,  
the sort of freedom you offered fully apparent,  
so the response changed.  
The shouts of 'Hosanna!'  
turned to cries of 'Crucify!'  
The hands outstretched in friendship  
became fists curled up in hate.  
The declarations of loyalty  
became voices raised in mockery and rejection.

Lord Jesus,  
**have mercy.**

You come to our lives  
and we welcome you with gladness.  
We have accepted you as our Saviour,  
the one who sets us free.  
But we too can so quickly change our tune  
when you overturn our expectations,  
when you do not act as we hope,  
when you turn out to have different ideas from our own.

We, too, even while professing faith  
and going through the motions of commitment,  
can push you aside,  
preferring our own way to yours.

Lord Jesus,  
**have mercy.**

Lord Jesus Christ,  
on this day we are reminded of how easy it is  
to welcome you as King of kings,  
but how hard to follow in the Way of the Cross.

Lord Jesus,  
**have mercy,**

for in your name we ask it.  
**Amen.**

❖ Lords Prayer

We say together the prayer that Jesus gave us:

**Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the  
power and the glory  
are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.**

❖ Gospel Mark 11:1-11

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage and Bethany at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two of his disciples, 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. If anyone asks you, 'Why are you doing this?' say, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" They went and found a colt outside in the street, tied at a doorway. As they untied it, some people standing there asked, "What are you doing, untying that colt?" They answered as Jesus had told them to, and the people let them go.

When they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks over it, he sat on it. Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they

had cut in the fields. Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "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 heaven!"

Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

#### ❖ Address I

The history of the Jewish people in the Holy Land was difficult from the first. Even though theirs was the "Promised Land" of God, the country was already settled. They had to carve out a nation from the land of the Edomites, Moabites, Jebusites, and other tribal groups in Canaan. But this was only the half of it. The area was a critical junction north-south and east-west routes. All the small nations were caught between Egypt, and the empires of Mesopotamia; first the Assyrians, then the neo-Babylonians, and then the Persians. After Israel split into two kingdoms the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrians, and though the southern kingdom of Judah beat off the Assyrian invasion, it succumbed to the neo-Babylonians and the Jewish people went into Exile. In due course the rise of the Persians restored them again to their homeland. However, they were not to enjoy independence. Alexander the Great destroyed the Persian Empire and took over. Following the collapse of Alexander's empire on his death, the area was ruled by the Greeks. The Promised Land was contested between the Ptolemies the Seleucids, who eventually won. When Antiochus Epiphanes came to power his desecration of the Temple created the only independence movement in the period after the Exile. The Maccabee brothers – Simon and Judas – led a revolt which for a brief 30-year period resulted in the re-establishment of an independent Jewish state. But this did not last. The Romans under Pompey ousted the Greeks. The Jewish princes, Aristobolus and Antigonus, were sent to Rome, to return later as Romanised puppet rulers. Later they were ousted by Herod, who was keen to preserve his power even at the expense of Jewish independence. He invited the Romans to takeover directly – little wonder that he was hated. Little wonder too that the Jewish people detested their lack of independence and were on the verge of rebellion throughout the whole Roman period. Eventually the revolt broke out in 66 A.D., and the Romans savagely suppressed it leading to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 and the dispersal of the Jewish people. The independent Jewish state had been lost, and remained so until it was re-established in 1947.

We know of this stuff from several sources – two in particular. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote two volumes – The Antiquities and the Jewish War – in which he acted as an apologist for the Jewish people to their Roman overlords. He tried to explain what had happened in Jewish history and why these people were so rebellious. He was also something of a toady, constantly seeking his own personal advantage and keeping in with the Romans, so what he writes has to be read carefully. The other source lies in the Apocrypha – those books that were written in the period after the Exile outside the core Old Testament of the Law and the Prophets. There are four books concerning the deeds of the Maccabees, which tell us of the progress of the revolt, but often they are history dressed up as religious texts. On your chairs are quotations from both The Antiquities and Maccabees – and as we go through these contemporary accounts of the history of the Jewish people after the Exile I want you to wave your palms whenever you hear sentences which could be describing a triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

But first, we need to establish what the expectation was in terms of the later prophets who expected the restoration of Jerusalem as an independent state. Elsewhere in the Gospels

Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday refers specifically to the prophecies of Zephaniah. There are two verses that are relevant:

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

*14:4 On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley; so that half of the Mount shall withdraw northwards, and the other half southwards.* Zephaniah is telling us that the King will come in peace, and that he will process to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

As Alexander approach Jerusalem, so he to progressed from the Mount of Olives into the city, accompanied by the priests, and he offered sacrifices as this passage shows.

And when [Alexander] was not far from the city, [they] went out in procession, with the priests and the multitude of the citizens. The procession was venerable, and the manner of it different from that of other nations. It reached to a place called Sapha, which name, translated into Greek, signifies a prospect, for you have thence a prospect both of Jerusalem and of the temple. And when the Phoenicians and the Chaldeans that followed him thought they should have liberty to plunder the city, and torment the high priest to death, which the king's displeasure fairly promised them, the very reverse of it happened; for Alexander, when he saw the multitude at a distance, in white garments, while the priests stood clothed with fine linen, and the high priest in purple and scarlet clothing, with his mitre on his head, having the golden plate whereon the name of God was engraved, he approached by himself, and adored that name, and first saluted the high priest. The Jews also did all together, with one voice, salute Alexander..... And when he had said this[ to Parmenio,] and had given the high priest his right hand, the priests ran along by him, and he came into the city. And when he went up into the temple, he offered sacrifice to God, according to the high priest's direction, and magnificently treated both the high priest and the priests.

Despite the fact that his allies in the area were Israel's enemies, Alexander shows piety and restrains them from plundering Jerusalem.

After the Selucids have been successful, the Greek king Antiochus enters Jerusalem as this passage from Maccabees shows:

*When Apollonius son of Menestheus was sent to Egypt for the coronation of Philometor as king, Antiochus learned that Philometor had become hostile to his government, and he took measures for his own security. Therefore upon arriving at Joppa he proceeded to Jerusalem. He was welcomed magnificently by Jason and the city, and ushered in with a blaze of torches and with shouts. Then he marched his army into Phoenicia.*

*After a period of three years Jason sent Menelaus, the brother of the previously mentioned Simon, to carry the money to the king and to complete the records of essential business. But he, when presented to the king, extolled him with an air of authority, and secured the high-priesthood for himself, outbidding Jason by three hundred talents of silver.*

*His attitude, like selling the High Priesthood to the highest bidder, created so much resentment that the Maccabees revolted – first Simon as this passage shows:*

*Those who were in the citadel at Jerusalem were prevented from going in and out to buy and sell in the country. So they were very hungry, and many of them perished from famine.*

*Then they cried to Simon to make peace with them, and he did so. But he expelled them from there and cleansed the citadel from its pollutions. On the twenty-third day of the second month, in the one hundred and seventy-first year, the Jews entered it 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. And subsequently his brother Judas was also victorious:*

*Then they crossed the Jordan into the large plain before Beth-shan. Judas kept rallying the laggards and encouraging the people all the way until he came to the land of Judah. So they went up to Mount Zion with joy and gladness, and offered burnt-offerings, because they had returned in safety; not one of them had fallen.*

*And going away hastily from thence, they came into Judea, singing psalms and hymns as they went, and indulging such tokens of mirth as are usual in triumphs upon victory. They also offered thank-offerings, both for their good success, and for the preservation of their army, for not one of the Jews was slain in these battles.*

But this was short lived, and the Romans took over, later installing Antigonus as ruler, who entered Jerusalem with the some arrogance:

*But when Antigonus was once returned from the army, and that feast was then at hand when they make tabernacles to [the honour of God,] it happened that Aristobulus was fallen sick, and that Antigonus went up most splendidly adorned, and with his soldiers about him in their armour, to the temple to celebrate the feast, and to put up many prayers for the recovery of his brother, when some wicked persons, who had a great mind to raise a difference between the brethren, made use of this opportunity of the pompous appearance of Antigonus, and of the great actions which he had done, and went to the king, and spitefully aggravated the pompous show of his at the feast, and pretended that all these circumstances were not like those of a private person; that these actions were indications of an affectation of royal authority;*

Finally we read of the Roman takeover:

*When Herod had despatched these affairs, and he understood that Marcus Agrippa had sailed again out of Italy into Asia, he made haste to him, and besought him to come to him into his kingdom, and to partake of what he might justly expect from one that had been his guest, and was his friend..... He also conducted him to the city Jerusalem, where all the people met him in their festival garments, and received him with acclamations. Agrippa also offered a hecatomb of sacrifices to God; and feasted the people*

This then was the background to Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

### ***What did Palm Sunday mean then?***

As you will probably appreciate from the tiredness of your arms, the idea of a triumphal procession from the Mount of Olives across the Kidron Valley into Jerusalem was not an unusual event. Virtually every one of the new rulers entering Jerusalem had undertaken such a procession. It coincided with the prophetic expectation set out by Zephaniah, and usually included some or all of the elements of a procession, throwing of coats and palms along the route, processing to the Temple, and then offering prayer or sacrifice. Not every procession had all of these elements, but all processions had some of them. So what did the people who saw Jesus' entry into Jerusalem make of all this? Clearly a declaration that here was a new king or ruler, and one who conform to religious expectations. Given the undercurrent of revolt, thoughts of another Judas Maccabeus might have been in mind. The fact that Jesus came riding on a colt (it doesn't necessarily have to be a donkey – it

could also mean a young horse) indicated that Jesus was coming in peace. The quotations from the Psalms were the ones to be expected as the procession wound its way up to Mount Zion, but the references to David would indicate that Jesus was thought, like David, to have been chosen of God, but to have been an unexpected choice. Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God would undoubtedly have given rise to an expectation of the coming of an independent Jewish religious state again.

Whilst this might have been in people's minds, you have to wonder whether or not this procession was planned. Parts of the account suggest that it was not. The disciples clearly didn't know anything about it; Jesus has to instruct them about finding the donkey or colt. Did Jesus make some arrangements with the owner the day before to borrow it? We don't know. The words that Jesus tells the disciples to use are ambiguous. Those who challenge them could have thought that they were servants sent on behalf of the owner, but the talk of returning the colt suggests not. Then there's the question of people spreading branches that they had cut in the fields. Clearly, they hadn't prepared in advance as they had to go out and collect the palm branches to use. Now the palm tree is a very ancient type of tree in which, as you know, the leaf branches grow out directly from the stem and in effect creates the trunk of the tree as the tree gets older. As the tree gets taller so the lower branches wither and drop off onto the ground. It seems unlikely that people went into the fields to cut palm leaves high up off the original tree, or cut branches from another tree. More likely they scooped up the semi desiccated palm leaves from the ground and threw these in the road – as the traditional practice of processions taught them to do. Finally, the procession gets to the Temple. But it's almost too late. It's a bit like having a procession which has co-opted the local Boys Brigade band finally turning up at the Cathedral only to find the custodians telling them that services are over for the day and they're going to shut in 5 minutes. You can have a quick look round, but then the doors will be closed against you. The final verse is a tremendous anti-climax. Clearly the priests of the Temple were not ready for this procession, and ignored it. After a brief look round and as it gets dark Jesus retraces his steps to his starting point on the Mount of Olives.

So what on earth was this procession about? What did Jesus intend by it? I think the key to that lies in the second reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians which is also part of the lectionary readings for today. But before we get to that we sing our next hymn.

- ❖ Hymn StF 265 Ride on, ride on in majesty (Winchester New)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CUYCxw0quuQ>

- ❖ Epistle Philippians 2:5-11

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death-- even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

❖ Address II

Paul appeals to the Philippians to be united in Christ. And he does so by suggesting that they should have the same attitude as Jesus Christ. He uses a poetic hymn that he may have coined himself, or he may have been quoting it from something used in the early worship of the Church. Whichever it is, it is very cleverly put together. It shows a very sophisticated use of Greek. I think it's a bit like the lyrics that you get in a Cole Porter song. Cole Porter writes in magnificent lyrics full of little complexities that tease and intrigue the mind. In his song "Every Time We Say Goodbye", the final two lines of the verse read:

*"There's no love song finer,  
So how strange the change from major to minor,  
Every time we say goodbye."*

Most song writers would have been happy just to have the simple end of line rhyme – finer/minor, but Cole Porter puts in a little internal rhyme – how strange the change – and then subtly refers to the fact that in music the major keys tend to be positive and upbeat, and the minor keys tend to be reflective and sad. How apt then in talking about the change from major to minor as lovers say goodbye. He reinforces this subtlety by in fact changing the key of the song from major to minor at that point. It's very cleverly put together, even if sometimes you simply gloss over it as you hear it.

The same is true of this passage in Philippians. It's subtly created around the Greek word kenodoxia. The word is made up from two shorter words – kenoo and doxia. They mean empty and glory. So the word kenodoxia in Greek means "empty glory". In verse 3 Paul exhorts the Philippians against kenodoxia. They are to avoid empty conceit (as most translations have it) and instead be like Christ who avoided empty conceit. He then goes on to quote from the hymn which utilises the two parts of kenodoxia, but not as nouns, but as adverbs. He changes the sense from something passive to something active. He says that Jesus "emptied himself" – the word in Greek is ekenosen – the ending implying self emptying. Having described how Jesus emptied himself in his Passion on the Cross, Paul goes on to explain how God has highly exalted Jesus – in Greek the word is hyperupsosen – to the highest place, to the highest glory in Greek.

So the whole of the passage is constructed around the word kenodoxia breaking it down into the individual elements to describe how Jesus did not grasp at an empty conceit, but emptied himself to the point of complete humiliation, before God exalted him to glory. And this I think it gives us a clue about the meaning of Palm Sunday. Palm Sunday was what the people expected of a king entering Jerusalem – but it was empty glory. Jesus rejects the empty glory that he has deliberately created. The people are not ready, his disciples are not ready, and the Temple priests are not ready to receive a king coming in glory. The pomp and show are a sham. Instead Jesus uses the experience to prepare the disciples – though it would largely be on reflection only that they realise this – for the self emptying and humiliation that will come with his arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial. Jesus will empty himself in service of others, and in obedience to God. But this is not the end. Glory will come with the resurrection, as Jesus is raised from death and becomes exalted and worshipped.

And the same can also be used to look at the timeless love of God. God does not want the empty glory of ritualistic worship from people whose hearts are far from him. As he says in the Prophets he despises the sacrifices that are routinely offered without the humble and contrite heart that he looks for. But instead of blazing with anger, God in his love empties himself and is prepared to almost humiliate himself to stand alongside his creation and bring it to redemption and reconciliation with him. He has done this through the person of Jesus Christ. The Magi came with gifts suitable for a king, looked for him in a palace, and instead found a vulnerable baby in a house, born to poor parents. In doing this God humbled himself so that we may become like him, and truly glorify him in worship that is worthy.

And the same is true for us and for the Church, for we are the Church. We may hanker after the empty conceit of the world with its desire for possessions and status and symbols of honour, but these are Kenodoxia. Instead we individually and collectively need to empty ourselves in service for those who have not yet realised the love of God. We need to do so even though it may be humiliating, and bring us mockery, accusation, criticism, and trouble. Because as Paul tells the Philippians it is by acting in this way that we become more like Christ and so glorify God.

- ❖ Hymn StF 317 At the name of Jesus (Evelyns/Camberwell)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7w-tDjlpqk>

- ❖ Prayer of Intercession

*As the Messiah, Jesus enters Jerusalem,  
knowing that he rides towards rejection and death  
in order to save his people.*

As we face up to the costly loving shown by our God,  
let us approach him in humility and pray to him now.

O God, give us in your Church undivided hearts  
to love you and one another, and go on loving,  
through insult and praise,  
through acceptance and rejection,  
in the sure knowledge that you are Lord.

*Silence*

Make us strong:  
**to do your will in all things.**

O God, may the kingdoms of this world  
soak up the values of your kingdom;  
may their leaders and their peoples uphold what is right and just,  
and establish a social order  
which is rooted in Godly love.

*Silence*

Make us strong:  
**to do your will in all things.**

O God, in all the heartaches and joys of human relationships,  
may we be governed by selfless love,  
faithful and forgiving like you,  
without limit.

*Silence*

Make us strong:  
**to do your will in all things**

O God, draw alongside all who suffer  
that they may know the comfort of your presence  
and the healing power of your forgiving love.

*Silence*

Make us strong:  
**to do your will in all things**

O God, we pray for all  
who are making that last journey of death,  
that they may be surrounded with your peace  
and rest in your love for ever.

*Silence*

Make us strong:  
**to do your will in all things.**

O God, we give you thanks  
that the Messiah has come to save your people.

Merciful Father,  
accept these prayers  
for the sake of your Son,  
our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

❖ Hymn StF 264 Make way, make way, for Christ the King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNDCyAB1Mvs>

❖ Blessing

God, go with us on our journey of faith -  
revive us when we grow weary,  
direct us when we go astray,  
inspire us when we lose heart,  
reprove us when we turn back.

Keep us travelling ever-onwards,  
a pilgrim people,  
looking to Jesus Christ  
who has run the race before us,  
and who waits to welcome us home.

**Amen.**