

# The King Is Coming

Who doesn't like a parade? It is an American tradition to watch the impressive Macy's Thanksgiving



**Michael K. Olmsted** Parade with all those giant balloons, floats, marching bands from across the nation, along with the stars of the show, Santa and Mrs. Claus. When I was a little boy my grandfather took me to see the Ringling Brothers Circus unload from a train in Chicago, elephants and all, then form a "working parade" to their show location and set up the big top. Mesmerizing!

What we call Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem was quite a spectacle. Crowds were shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" (v. 9). People were spreading palm branches and their coats on the roadway before him. But there were other observers: Roman soldiers ready to step in if this demonstration turned violent, and temple authorities who wanted no problems from religious fanatics who could upset their tenuous peace with Rome. But the people were hungry for hope in a world dominated by corrupt politicians, the presence of foreign troops and a longing for God's promises to his oppressed people.

The entire city was focused on God's promised Messiah because this was Passover. It was the celebration of God's freeing his people from slavery in Egypt, and the hope that this could be the year that David's promised descendant would appear and restore Israel to greatness.

There are two different crowds in this story. Scholars tell us that Jerusalem's population of around 40,000 could swell by as many as 200,000 pilgrims for Passover. Jesus fame had been spreading in Galilee to the north for some time, so he was surrounded by a sizable crowd of Galileans as he entered the city. Also, he and his disciples were staying in

the nearby village of Bethphage (most likely Bethany) where he had dear friends. The road from that small village southeast of Jerusalem passed between the Mount of Olives and the eastern wall of Jerusalem. The road would have been crowded with pilgrims. Excitement was building every step of the way.

With the repeated stories of Jesus' teachings and miracles the crowd's anticipation was growing. We wonder how the excitement could so quickly turn to rejection and arrest. Keep in mind the atmosphere within the city was tainted by a religious establishment that guarded their authority and privileges as guaranteed by the Romans. This alternate crowd called the shots, monitored public sentiment and saw Jesus and those Galileans from the north as a potential problem. That latter group would assert their authority, using Roman forces to do the dirty work! They would shout "Crucify him!"

Jesus did not enter Jerusalem in a king's chariot with an armed force. He came as a humble servant seated on a donkey and her colt, a man of the people, armed with God's love and grace. The title "Son of David" was not commonly used, but became a popular phrase connecting Jesus to the image of God's Son as the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to all the world. The excited crowd shouted a line from Psalm 118:26: "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." This line was commonly chanted by pilgrims coming to worship at the temple in Jerusalem.

But this crowd, informed by the pilgrims who had witnessed Jesus' miracles and heard him teach in Galilee, saw Jesus as the promised Messiah. The Apostle John's account offers this insight: "His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of (Jesus) and had been done to him." (John 12:16)

Like those first disciples we do well to study all the Scriptures, evaluating

how much our interpretation and expectations are shaped by tradition and emotional convenience. God's Son and the good news of his love and grace must transcend our "church" labels and divisions. Jesus' humble entry to Jerusalem will be followed by the shocking humility and agony of the cross. Although the apostles did not understand at first, they came to recognize that God's grace is often marked by suffering and sacrifice in their own lives. Easter approaches quickly, but the reality and joy of our faith cost God dearly!

In this Easter season we are battered by many misleading ideas about God's purpose and love. Our culture celebrates success, power and freedom, but those ideas are deformed by prejudice, selfishness, racism, violence and pride. Political and even religious voices support ideas that conflict obviously with the life and teachings of Jesus. I wonder had I been in that excited crowd welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem, what would have been my response after he was arrested, crucified and buried? Would that picture take away my hope or transform my thinking and living as a child of God?

We voice our hope in the risen Christ, the Christ of the book called Revelation, the King who will come again to crush evil and consign Satan and his servants into eternal fire. But instead of celebrating ultimate judgment, what if we picture the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? What if we practice forgiveness, compassion and love even for the unlovely?

Discipline is required in the Christian life. We want a parade, good times, prosperity, simple answers. But life is messy and people are difficult. So, on this Palm Sunday, with its joyful music and children waving their palm branches, celebrate the Jesus who understood his parade would lead to a cross ... and that cross, now empty, is the symbol that God's love wins in the end. Sing hallelujah. The King has come!