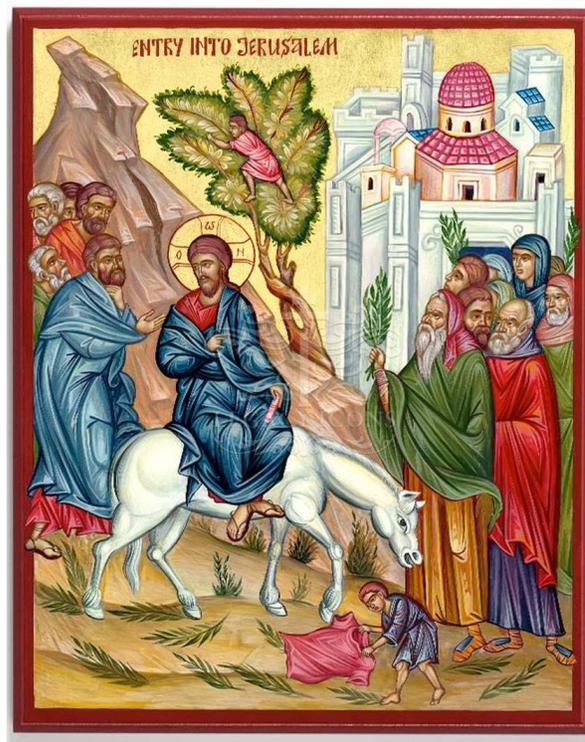


Thursday before Palm Sunday
April 5, 2012

From Bethany to Jerusalem: A Prelude of Joy

excerpted from "A Year of the Lord Liturgical Bible Studies"

During much of the liturgical calendar we follow Christ preaching, teaching, and healing in the villages and countryside of Galilee and Judea. As Holy Week approaches, the action shifts to Jerusalem and the surrounding towns. At the height of His ministry Christ came to Bethany, a town situated on the east side of the Mount of Olives, where he performed an astounding miracle – the raising of Lazarus to life. After spending several days with His friends in the area of Bethany, Christ then took His disciples in a triumphal procession into Jerusalem for the celebration of the Passover and His final encounter with the Jewish leaders. These two events, the raising of Lazarus and the triumphal entry into Jerusalem are celebrated at the beginning of Holy Week on Lazarus Saturday and Palm Sunday. These feast are moments of triumph, a prelude of joy, before the solemn days of Holy Week.



Saturday of Lazarus

The hymns of the Saturday of Lazarus extol Christ's resurrection power and anticipate His triumph over death through His own resurrection:

Christ is the joy of all, the truth, the light, the life and the resurrection of the world. Because of His goodness, he appeared to those on earth and He became Himself the pattern of the resurrection, granting divine forgiveness to all.

Kontakion, Saturday of Lazarus

Giving us before Your passion an assurance of the general resurrection, O Christ our God, You have raised Lazarus from the dead. Therefore, like the young of Jerusalem, we also carry symbols of victory, and cry to You, the Victor over death: Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!

Dismissal Hymn

Saturday of Lazarus – Also chanted on Palm Sunday



The name of Lazarus in Hebrew means “God is my help” or “God has helped.” Lazarus was the “friend” of Jesus (Jn. 11:3,11). We are told that “Jesus loved Martha and her sister (Mary) and Lazarus” (Jn. 11:5). It is not surprising, therefore, that Jesus in His humanity was moved to tears by the mourning of this family which was especially dear to Him (Jn. 11:35). What joy the astounding miracle must have caused in Bethany on that day! Yet this miracle was but a shadow of the glorious resurrection of Christ. Lazarus was raised to ordinary life and was to die again. But Christ rose in glory to a supernatural order of life in which death is totally powerless.

The Church Fathers interpret the raising of Lazarus symbolically, too, as a sign of our spiritual resurrection during the present life. Just as Lazarus came out of the tomb and was freed of his grave clothes, so also each Christian through repentance and baptism comes out of the darkness of a spiritual death and is loosened from the bands of sin, thus being granted a new life in Christ.

Read John 11:1-45, the Gospel reading for the Saturday of Lazarus.

Read also Hebrews, 12:28-13:8, the Epistle reading for the Saturday of Lazarus. Having received new life by Christ’s resurrection power, this passage exhorts us to express newness in everyday conduct.

1. Why should Christians be thankful (vs. 28a)?
2. How should Christians behave toward one another (vs. 1)?
3. How should Christians behave toward others?

We should _____ (vs. 2)

We should _____ (vs. 3a).

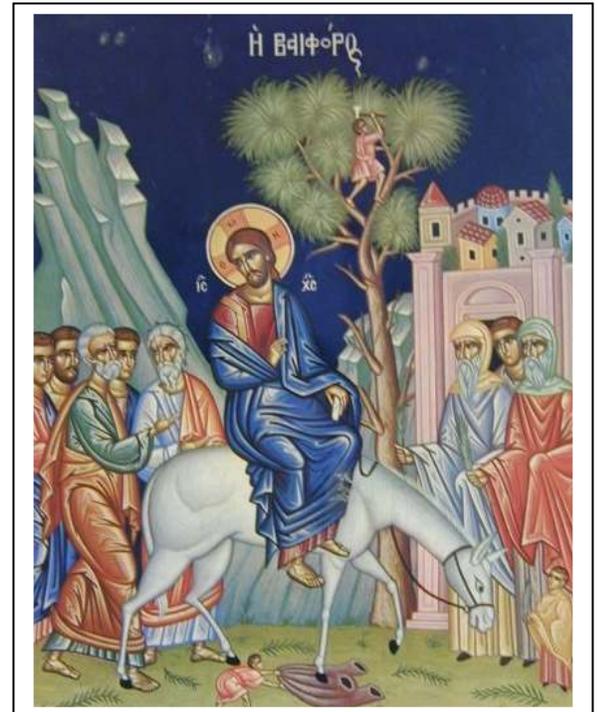
We should _____ (vs. 3b).

4. What are some examples of personal ethics of Christians?

5. Husbands and wives must be _____ (vs. 4).
6. Christians should keep their lives _____ (vs. 5).
7. What should Christians say in prayerful boldness (vs. 6)?
8. What is the unshakeable faith of Christians (vs. 8)?
9. How can a person's life be unwrapped from the bands of sin in order that that person may experience "resurrection newness"?
10. How can Hebrews 13:2-3 be applied in your own life?

Palm Sunday

"This child is chosen by God for the fall and the salvation of many" (Luke 2:34). The elder Simeon's words were fulfilled in Jesus' adult ministry. No one generated so diverse a reaction as Jesus did among His contemporaries. To those who came to Him with faith, Jesus was sent by God, healing, forgiving, and teaching the people. Peter confessed Him with the words: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16:16). Jesus was God's Anointed, full of the Holy Spirit, one in whose person, words, and actions the new age of salvation was dawning. To others, however, Christ was a potential rabble rouser (Jn 11:48), someone influenced by demons (Mk. 3:22) and a blasphemer (Mt. 9:3). The more the people were attracted to Him, the more He seemed to threaten the security of the religious and political order of the day. When Christ came to Jerusalem for the last time at the height of His ministry, this was the atmosphere, one filled with hope and controversy, enthusiasm and hostility, joy and tension.



In the ancient world kings and generals often led triumphal processions into cities. These were magnificent spectacles of power and pomp involving chariots, horses, soldiers, arms and wealth. But Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem included no such external signs of power and splendor. In the Gospels we find Him always walking. There is no reference that He was ever on a horse! And now He comes into Jerusalem with a band of simple Galilean fishermen riding on a donkey. What king, asks Chrysostom in a homily, ever entered into a city on a donkey? Christ came as the Prince of Peace. A spontaneous crowd and enthusiastic children gave Him a hero's welcome. Jesus accepted their warm acclaim as a joyful expression of His spiritual kingship. This humble setting fulfilled the prophecy in Zechariah.

***Rejoice, rejoice, people of Zion! Shout for joy, you people of Jerusalem!
Look, your king is coming to you! He comes triumphant and victorious,
But humble and riding on a donkey – on a colt, On the foal of a donkey.***

Zachariah 9:9

Read John 12:1-18, the Gospel reading for Palm Sunday.

Read also Philippians 4:4-9, the Epistle reading for Palm Sunday. This passage describes the joyful attitude of Christians as they await the second coming of Christ.

1. What is the foundation of a Christian's joy (vs. 4)?

2. How should Christians await the glorious coming of Christ (vs. 5-6)?

Show a _____ toward everyone. Don't _____
about everything. In all your prayers _____ always asking
Him with _____

3. What will keep our hearts and minds in Christ (vs. 7)?

4. On what should our minds dwell (vs. 8)?

5. How do you interpret Jesus' words: "You will always have poor people with you, but you will not always have me" (Jn. 12:8)?



On Palm Sunday worshipers symbolically acclaim Christ as King by holding palms in their hands. In Orthodox parishes these palms are often shaped into a cross, a reminder that Palm Sunday is the beginning of a far greater drama – the sacred passion of Christ for the salvation of the world. He who triumphantly comes to Jerusalem, comes to die. Palm Sunday ushers in Holy Week. In the background of triumphant joy stands the challenging shadow of the Cross. Those who acclaim Christ as King will behold Him as the Crucified One.