

**ENTRANCE OF THE LORD INTO JERUSALEM**  
**John 12:1-18**  
**By Archpriest Peter Olsen**  
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Three times a year the nation of Israel traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate the great feasts of Passover, Tabernacles and Pentecost. And not only the Jews, but many Gentiles came as well. Since today's Gospel takes place during the time of Passover, a great crowd had gathered in Jerusalem. Large crowds of people would always follow Jesus wherever He went. Yesterday we remembered when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead in the city of Bethany, which is about two miles from Jerusalem. Yesterday's Gospel reading told us that many more of the Jews believed in Jesus when they saw how He rose Lazarus from the dead. Today the Lord makes His triumphal entry into Jerusalem sitting on the foal of a donkey. King David instructed that his son Solomon ride upon David's own mule when David sent Solomon to be anointed as King. Jesus enters Jerusalem today in the same manner. Crowds of Israelites, and no doubt some Gentiles as well, go out to meet Jesus waving bundles of Palm branches in joyous celebration. This is reminiscent of the Jewish practice to wave bundles of palm branches when celebrating the feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:40; 2 Mac.10:6-7). The Jews spread their garments under Jesus' feet as He rode in, the same as they would do when greeting royalty or a King. They cried out "Hosanna!", which means "Save us!" in Hebrew, and "Blessed be the name of the Lord!", an excerpt from one of the Hallel Psalms<sup>1</sup>, which were customarily sung on the great feasts. The prophet Zechariah foretold that in the royal procession the Messiah, like Solomon, will ride on a humble donkey instead of a powerful war horse, for the Messiah will banish the instruments of warfare and proclaim "peace" to Israel and all nations (Zech. 9:10). Thus the Messiah will not be a military general poised to fight against Israel's political oppressor's, but a peaceful king who will call for an end to retaliation and bloodshed.

Have no doubt ~ Jesus was a powerful king and leader, the *most* powerful, and He came not to merely speak platitudes about peace and brotherhood, but to definitely establish His Kingdom. Jesus' Kingdom transcends and is greater than all earthly kingdoms. The visible manifestation of Jesus' Kingdom is the Church, yet the Church is much more than an institution or community of imperfect human beings, no matter how good their intentions may be. The Lord tells us that the Kingdom of Heaven is within us (Luke 17:21). It's spiritual dimension directly transcends its physical dimension, in a real way manifesting the Kingdom of Heaven here and now on the earth. In other words, the Kingdom of Heaven is not merely some abstract thing that we seek to obtain sometime in the future in another life. The Kingdom of Heaven, because of the saving acts of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, is a reality that we participate in *here* and *now* through the Church and its Holy Mysteries (Sacraments). "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven" we say in the Lord's prayer.

Today is a great and joyous feast. Today we celebrate by also waving palm branches and pussy willows and we also cry out "Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!" Yet while today we are celebrating, the Jewish leaders at the same time are plotting how they can put not only Jesus, but also Lazarus to death. The Christian faith is based on the fact that the experience of the Cross must come first, the experience of struggling in patience and faith in the face of immense suffering and grief precedes the joy and exultation of the Resurrection. You cannot have the latter without the former. As much as our suffering and griefs may seem impossible to bear, the saints, and above all, our Lord Himself, experienced a much heavier cross than the one that we bear, yet they endured. In the biographical film about St. Nektarios that was recently shown in American theaters, near the end of his life St. Nektarios says, "I must go to see my Mother" when he feels that he can no longer bear the physical pain of his illness. He crawls on top of a donkey in excruciating pain and he visits a very holy icon of the Theotokos. This is the "Mother" that he wanted to see. He weeps and lays his pain and suffering at her feet, and begs her for help, for he cries that he can

no longer bear or tolerate the pain that he is going through. On the Cross Jesus repeats the words of the psalmist, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” (Psalm 22:1).

All of us carry many heavy burdens. We grieve for our children. We grieve for our relatives. We grieve for our loved ones. We grieve for our nation, we grieve for the world. And with what’s left, we grieve for ourselves. Yet the Christian faith is not a morbid faith of sorrow. Christianity is a faith of joy. In the midst of our crosses, we grow closer to God. There is not a genuine Christian anywhere who cannot say that he or she has not experienced the joy of God. Confession cleanses us, the Holy Mysteries sanctify and strengthen us, prayer brings the Lord into our hearts and into our lives. In the midst of our sufferings we can find joy. In the midst of all the darkness we can see the light and bright radiance of God shining through. May the Lord strengthen and help all of us, like St. Nektarios and above all like our Savior Himself, Who faithfully and willingly endured His voluntary Cross to the very end, so that we may experience the bright and radiant joy of the Resurrection. Good Pascha to all! Amen.

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1. Hallel, (Hebrew: “Praise”), Jewish liturgical designation for Psalms 113–118 (“Egyptian Hallel”) as read in synagogues on festive occasions. In ancient times Jews recited these hymns on the three Pilgrim Festivals, when they offered their required sacrifices in the Temple of Jerusalem.

