

April 10, 2022

“BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!”

Don't you love witnessing wide-eyed children parading before the congregation on Palm Sunday waving (or sometimes whipping!) their palm branches? We get caught up in the beautiful expression of worship. Imagine joining that original Palm Sunday Passover crowd in Jerusalem hailing Jesus as He entered the city, straddling a donkey.

John's Gospel alone includes the detail of the palm branches: ***“So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!’”*** (John 12:13 ESV). Luther would, no doubt, ask, “What does this mean?”

1) ***Why were they waving palm branches?*** This was practically an instinctive reaction for the Jewish people. Palm branches were a regular part of the Feast of Tabernacles celebration (Leviticus 23:40). When Simon the Maccabee drove the Syrian forces out of Jerusalem (141 BC), his victory was celebrated with music and the waving of palm branches. The palm branch was a symbol of Judean pride. It was stamped on Judean coins minted by both the Jews and the Romans. Palm branches were the perfect choice for welcoming a victorious King, a deliverer—the Messiah.

2) ***What did they mean by crying out, “Hosanna! . . .”?*** The crowd was shouting the familiar words of Psalm 118. *Hosanna* (in 118:25) is a prayer that God would bring salvation. The prayer came to be used as a shout of praise. This psalm is part of the Hallel Psalms (113–118) sung each morning by the temple choir during the Feast of Tabernacles. Men and boys waved a *lulab* (a few shoots of willow and myrtle tied together with palm) as the choir reached the “*Hosanna!*” portion of Psalm 118. Did the crowd on Palm Sunday comprehend what they were shouting?

3) ***Who is it in these words that is “Blessed”?*** In Psalm 118, the blessing surely applies to every pilgrim plodding the path to Jerusalem—“. . . *he who comes in the name of the Lord.*” But the Palm-Sunday crowd is welcoming Jesus as the Blessed One, arriving just as the prophet foretold (Zechariah 9:9). They hail Him as the Messiah-King—“. . . *even the King of Israel!*” (words *not* included in Psalm 118, but echoing Luke 19:38). Sadly, their words of adoration would not last through the week. Jesus was not the kind of messiah most were looking for.

Jesus Christ—His name means “Savior-Messiah.” *Come today in the name of the Lord* to worship the King who suffered and died for your sake. *Hosanna!*

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