

Mount Olive Lutheran Church  
5327 W. Washington Blvd.  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208-1798

Palm Sunday  
April 5, 2009  
Zechariah 9:9-12

## *"A Peace March"*

by Pastor Mark E. Wangerin

### Introduction

Today we are privileged by the grace of God to enter once again into this sacred week in the church year—Holy Week. In recent years there has been somewhat of a shift in the emphasis of this day from the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on the first Palm Sunday to recalling the events of the Passion of our Lord. In fact the church calendar identifies this day as Palm Sunday (The Sunday of the Passion) Perhaps some of this is due to the fact that less and less people are availing themselves of the opportunities of worship during Holy Week itself and so it is thought that the facts of Christ's suffering and death should be emphasized more on this day. In the process the events of Palm Sunday itself might be downplayed. So we take the opportunity this weekend in our services to once again focus on the events of Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem. As we do that however, we will do it from the perspective of the Old Testament lesson, the great prophecy of the prophet Zechariah.

As our theme for this day, we have chosen: "A Peace March" Now peace marches are well known in our day. They are held for all kinds of reasons and by many different groups. But this was probably the most unusual peace march ever held, for it had just one main participant. And the peace for which He was marching is the peace that passes all understanding.

### I. The Prophecy and Fulfillment

In the Old Testament lesson for this day, the prophet Zechariah awakens the people with a call to rejoice. His words are words of joy to a people that have gone through much trouble and distress. He calls upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem (the daughter of Zion) to rejoice and shout. And why? Behold, your king comes to you! They are to look forward with great expectation to the arrival of their king. And as the prophecy describes this king we see that it is no ordinary king whose image is painted here in the words of the prophet. For this king is righteous and has salvation. Of what earthly king could it be said that of himself he is righteous? And of what earthly king could it be said that he brings salvation, or is salvation in himself. Most important of all, this king does not arrive in great splendor upon a mighty steed, a stallion, a war horse. No, he comes gently, humble, riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey. It would be a scene to make the great and powerful leaders of the world laugh in derision. This is your king, who arrives in such humility! What can he possibly do for you?

But the prophecy is clear on that fact as well. The remaining verses of the Old Testament lesson point out that the king will proclaim peace to the nations and his rule will extend to

the ends of the earth. The chariots of war, the horses of war, the weapons of war will all be taken away. This humble king will have a greater effect upon the world than any other king ever had or ever will.

And in the Gospel lesson for today we see the fulfillment of that word. I do not think that the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, or the wayfarers along the road from Bethany and Bethphage down the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem were aware that they would be part of the fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah. But there was One who was aware. In all the Gospels accounts of the travels of Jesus, his going from one place to another, it is never stated that he used any other means than walking. Of course, he used a boat on occasion on the Sea of Galilee. But there is never a mention of Jesus riding upon any beast of burden except for this one time.

But now it is Jesus who makes sure this takes place. He sent two 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?' tell him, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here shortly.'" (Mark 11:2-3) Not just any donkey either, but a colt and its mother. The Lord has need of it. It was not needed so that the Lord could comfortably ride into Jerusalem. It was certainly not needed because he was unable to walk into the city. Indeed on the next days he would walk into the city on several occasions. But the Lord needed it so that his true and everlasting word might find its perfect fulfillment. For St. Matthew in the Gospel states that "this took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet" immediately after the words about Jesus sending the disciples to fetch the donkey. It would be the first of many times in the coming week that our Lord would fulfill the words of old. Indeed, the prophecies begin to light up like great signs along the way for God's word is the truth.

So it is that on that Palm Sunday our Lord Jesus Christ entered into Jerusalem in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zechariah, humbly, gently, riding on a donkey. And the crowd in its excitement greets their king by speaking other words of Scripture, other prophecies thus finding their fulfillment: "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!" (Mark 11:9-10) Hosanna! they cried. Lord, save us. And who better to save than the king who is righteous and has salvation as the prophecy declared. And truly blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, as the ancient psalm, sung by the pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem found its perfect fulfillment on this day as the Lord himself entered into his city, his Zion.

## II. A Ride for Peace

I am sure that the crowd did not know what lay ahead for Jesus as he entered into Jerusalem on that day. Indeed, no one could know but our Lord himself. He knew what lay ahead—he knew of the humiliation and suffering. As St. Paul writes in the Epistle for this morning: "He humbled himself and became obedient unto death—even death on a cross!" That was the

road that lay before him. But that road was the way of a peace march. We need to return for a few moments to the last verse of the Old Testament lesson and hear again the word of the Lord through the prophet Zechariah: "I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war horses from Jerusalem and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth."

What a picture is drawn here. The Lord would destroy the weapons of war, not tanks and planes and artillery, but chariots and war horses and battle bow. And he would do it through the one who would proclaim peace. But there would be a great price that would be paid. Indeed in our worship over the coming days we will be reminded most powerfully of that struggle as our Lord would defeat sin, death, and the devil for us in his suffering and death. It would not be without cost, for it would lead to the shedding of the innocent blood of the Son of God for us. But it would be the greatest of victories.

Indeed, one week from today, Lord willing we will gather here and celebrate the victory. We will hear in anticipation the greeting of the risen Lord to his disciples locked in fear together in a room: "Peace be with you." He would proclaim peace. He continues to proclaim it to a world that so desperately needs it. There will continue to be peace marches of all kinds. But there will never be another like that Palm Sunday march. Yet each of us in our Christian lives is marching along. The love of Christ and his peace goes with us as well. And the world (a world dying in sin) and its inhabitants so needs to hear of that peace.

As we sang before:

No tramp of soldier's marching feet  
With banners and with drums  
No sound of music's martial beat:  
"The King of glory comes!"  
To greet what pomp of kingly pride  
No bells in triumph ring.  
No city gates swing open wide:  
"Behold, behold your King!"

And yet He comes the children cheer;  
With palms His path is strown.  
With every step the cross draws near  
The King of glory's throne.  
Astride a colt He passes by  
As loud hosannas ring,  
Or else the very stone would cry  
"Behold, behold your King!"

Behold your King comes, humble and lowly, righteous and having salvation.  
In Jesus' Name. Amen.