

## Palm Sunday

*“Hosanna in the Highest!” (Mark 11:10)*

*“Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!” (Ps 118:26)*

*“Hosanna to the Son of David!” (Matthew 21:9)*

One of the most interesting Christian documents to come down to us from the fourth century is a tourist guide. It is a record of a pilgrimage to the Holy Land by a certain lady, Egeria (or Etheria, Aetheria), who some have suggested was a nun from Spain or some other place in Western Europe. Whilst there is much argument about Egeria, her travel diary provides us with a wealth of information concerning the liturgical life of the ancient Church in the Holy Land.

From Egeria’s diary, it is clear that the basic cycle of major feasts, liturgical practices and communal religious life in Palestine were already well established by the time of her visit in the fourth century; and we learn that the commemoration of the Entry into Jerusalem, our Palm Sunday, was an important part of the celebration of the Sufferings, Death and Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Today, we continue that tradition established so early in the worship experience of the Christian Church. Today, we remember the Triumphant Entry of our Lord into Jerusalem.

Many have suggested, perhaps not totally incorrectly, that Jesus comes to Jerusalem riding on a donkey, rather than a horse, as a sign of profound humility. However, we must also remember that in ancient times it was not unusual for kings and generals to ride “less noble beasts” when not going into battle. (Cf. 1 Kings 1:33; Zechariah 9:9-10) Jesus comes today to Jerusalem not as a warrior, not as the military messiah so desired by many of the Jews, not as a conqueror, but as the Prince of Peace.

There has been a regrettable, and escalating, tendency to reduce our Christian Feasts to the level of “kindergarten celebrations” – one hears, “Christmas is for the kids”, “Easter is a time for children”. However, from early times, especially in the East, Palm Sunday has been associated especially with children, and their presence at the Liturgy and Procession much encouraged.

Unfortunately, that is where it sometimes stops. We often see parents proudly bring their children to church on Palm Sunday, then not to be seen till Holy Friday or for another year. It is admirable to encourage our children to meet the Lord on Palm Sunday as he draws near on this Blessed Day and as a family to proclaim with them: *“Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”* However, there is still another week of Holy Services culminating in the Glorious Pascha of the Lord, Easter. And, we are all, as faithful, called upon to join without hesitations these beautiful liturgical services, while not letting go of our on-going fast or forgetting our love for our neighbour, especially the needy, i.e. almsgiving.

As we strive to reclaim our Christian Calendar, our *holy-days*, it is important that we give our children and ourselves an authentic Christian understanding of the complete cycle of the Church celebrations. *“Hosanna in the highest!”*

**Archdeacon Anthony Lawrence**