

LUKE 19:28–40

The Triumphal Entry

²⁸ With these words, Jesus went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

²⁹ As they came close, as near as Bethany and Bethphage, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples on ahead. ³⁰ ‘Go into the village over there,’ he said, ‘and as you arrive you’ll find a colt tied up, one that nobody has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

³¹ If anyone says to you, “Why are you untying it?” you should say, “Because the Master needs it”.’

³² The two who were sent went off and found it as Jesus had said to them. ³³ They untied the colt, and its owners said to them, “Why are you untying the colt?”

³⁴ “Because the Master needs it,” they replied.

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt, and mounted Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he was going along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came to the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began to celebrate and praise God at the tops of their voices for all the powerful deeds they had seen.

³⁸ ‘Welcome, welcome, welcome with a blessing,’ they sang.

‘Welcome to the king in the name of the Lord!

‘Peace in heaven, and glory on high!’

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees from the crowd said to Jesus, ‘Teacher, tell your disciples to stop that.’

⁴⁰ ‘Let me tell you,’ replied Jesus, ‘if they stayed silent, the stones would be shouting out!’

Mile after uphill mile, it seems a long way even today in a car. You wind up through the sandy hills from Jericho, the lowest point on the face of the earth, through the Judaeian desert, climbing all the way. Halfway up, you reach sea level; you’ve already climbed a long way from the Jordan valley, and you still have to ascend a fair-sized mountain. It is almost always hot; since it seldom if ever rains, it’s almost always dusty as well.

That was the way the pilgrims came, with Jesus going on ahead, as he had planned all along. This was to be the climax of his story, of his public career, of his vocation. He knew well enough what lay ahead, and had set his face to go and meet it head on. He couldn’t stop announcing the **kingdom**, but that announcement could only come true if he now embodied in himself the things he’d been talking about. The living God was at work to heal and save, and the forces of evil and death were massed to oppose him, like Pharaoh and the armies of Egypt trying to prevent the Israelites from leaving. But this was to be the moment of God’s new **Exodus**, God’s great Passover, and nothing could

stop [Jesus](#) going ahead to celebrate it.

Even when you drive, rather than walk, from Jericho to the top of the Mount of Olives, the sense of relief and excitement when you reach the summit is intense. At last you exchange barren, dusty desert for lush green growth, particularly at Passover time, at the height of spring. At last you stop climbing, you crest the summit, and there before you, glistening in the sun, is the holy city, Jerusalem itself, on its own slightly smaller hill across a narrow but deep valley. Bethany and Bethphage nestle on the Jericho side of the Mount of Olives. Once you pass them, Jerusalem comes into view almost at once. The end of the journey; the pilgrimage to end all pilgrimages; Passover-time in the city of God.

For [Jesus](#) it's a royal occasion, to be carefully planned and staged so as to make exactly the right point. The animal he chose—presumably by pre-arrangement with the owners; this wasn't the first time [Jesus](#) had been to Bethany!—was a young foal, almost certainly a donkey's colt. (The word Luke uses would more normally mean a young horse or pony; but he knew [Zechariah 9:9](#), the prophecy of the **Messiah** riding on a young donkey, and he uses the word that occurs there.) Like the tomb in which [Jesus](#) would lie a week later ([23:52](#)), it had never been used before. The **disciples** pick up the theme, and in a kind of instant royal celebration they spread cloaks along the road for him. Down they go, down the steep path to the Kidron valley, and the crowd starts to sing part of the great psalm of praise ([Psalm 118](#)) that pilgrims always sang on the way to Jerusalem: a song of victory, a hymn of praise to the God who defeats all his foes and establishes his kingdom. [Jesus](#) will himself quote from the psalm in one of his debates in Jerusalem ([20:17](#)). He comes himself as the fulfilment of the nation's hopes, answering their longings for a king who would bring peace to earth from **heaven** itself.

And yet ... the grumblers are still there; some **Pharisees**, going along with the crowd, suddenly become anxious about what will happen if the authorities in Jerusalem think for a minute that there's a messianic demonstration going on. [Jesus](#) knows, and Luke knows, and we as his readers know, what awaits the Master when he gets to the city. From [Jesus](#)' point of view, this is why there is such a celebration in the first place: it is appropriate precisely because he is coming to bring God's salvation, God's great Exodus, through his own Passover action on the cross. Had the crowds known this, they would have been puzzled and distressed, as indeed they soon will be.

As we arrive at Jerusalem with [Jesus](#), the question presses upon us. Are we going

along for the trip in the hope that Jesus will fulfil some of our hopes and desires? Are we ready to sing a psalm of praise, but only as long as Jesus seems to be doing what we want ? The long and dusty pilgrim way of our lives gives most of us plenty of time to sort out our motives for following Jesus in the first place. Are we ready not only to spread our cloaks on the road in front of him, to do the showy and flamboyant thing, but also now to follow him into trouble, controversy, trial and death ?