

Swapnil Sansar

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What is Palm Sunday and why do we celebrate it?

Entry of Christ into Jerusalem (1320) by Pietro Lorenzetti: entering the city on a donkey symbolizes



arrival in peace rather than as a war-waging king arriving on a horse.

Palm Sunday is a Christian moveable feast that falls on the Sunday before Easter. The feast commemorates Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, an event mentioned in each of the four canonical Gospels.

In many Catholic and Episcopal denominations, worship services on Palm Sunday include a procession of the faithful carrying palms, representing the palm branches the crowd scattered in front of Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem. The difficulty of procuring palms in unfavorable climates led to their substitution with branches of native trees, including box, olive, willow, and yew. The Sunday was often named after these substitute trees, as in Yew Sunday, or by the general term Branch Sunday.

Jesus riding on a donkey in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, depicted by James Tissot. In the accounts of the four canonical Gospels, Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem takes place about a week before his Resurrection.

Christian theologians believe that the symbolism is captured prophetically in the Old Testament: Zechariah 9:9 "The Coming of Zion's King See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey". It suggests that Jesus was declaring he was the King of Israel to the anger of the Sanhedrin. According to the Gospels, Jesus Christ rode a donkey into Jerusalem, and the celebrating people there laid down their cloaks and small branches of trees in front of him, and sang part of Psalm 118: 25–26 – ... Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord ... may refer to the Eastern tradition that it is an animal of peace, versus the horse, which is the animal of war. A king would have ridden a horse when he was bent on war and ridden a donkey to symbolize his arrival in peace. Jesus' entry to Jerusalem would have thus symbolized his entry as the Prince of Peace, not as a war-waging king. "Flevit super illam" (He wept over it); by Enrique Simonet, 1892.

In Luke 19:41 as Jesus approaches Jerusalem, he looks at the city and weeps over it (an event known as Flevit super illam in Latin), foretelling the suffering that awaits the city in the events of the

destruction of the Second Temple. In many lands in the ancient Near East, it was customary to cover in

some way the path of someone thought worthy of the highest honour. The Hebrew Bible (2 Kings 9:13) reports that Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, was treated this way. Both the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John report that people gave Jesus this form of honour. In the synoptics the people are described as laying their garments and cut rushes on the street, whereas John specifies fronds of palm (Greek phoinix). In Jewish tradition, the palm is one of the Four Species carried for Sukkot, as prescribed for rejoicing at Leviticus 23:40. In the Greco-Roman culture of the Roman Empire, which strongly influenced Christian tradition, the palm branch was

a symbol of triumph and victory. It became the most common attribute of the goddess Nike or Victory. For contemporary Roman observers, the procession would have evoked the Roman triumph, when the triumphator laid down his arms and wore the toga, the civilian garment of peace that might be ornamented with emblems of the palm. Although the Epistles of Paul refer to Jesus as "triumphing", the entry into Jerusalem may not have been regularly pictured as a triumphal procession in this sense before the 13th century. In ancient Egyptian religion, the palm was carried in funeral processions and represented eternal life. The palm branch later was used as a symbol of Christian martyrs and their spiritual victory or triumph over death. In Revelation 7:9, the white-clad multitude stand before the throne and Lamb holding palm branches.

Eastern and Oriental Christianity

Palm Sunday, or the "Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem," as it is often called in some Orthodox Churches, is one of the Twelve Great Feasts of the liturgical year. The day before Palm Sunday, Lazarus Saturday, believers often prepare palm fronds by knotting them into crosses in preparation for the procession on Sunday. The hangings and vestments in the church are changed to a festive colour – gold in the Greek tradition, and green in the Slavic tradition. The Troparion of the Feast (a short hymn) indicates that the resurrection of Lazarus is a prefiguration of Jesus's own Resurrection: O Christ our God When Thou didst raise Lazarus from the dead before Thy Passion, Thou didst confirm the resurrection of the universe. Wherefore, we like children, carry the banner of triumph and victory, and we cry to Thee, O Conqueror of love, Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord.

In the Russian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian Orthodox Church, Ukrainian Catholic Church, Ruthenian Catholic Church, Polish, Bavarian and Austrian Roman Catholics, and various other Eastern European peoples, the custom developed of using pussy willow instead of palm fronds because the latter are not readily available that far north. There is no canonical requirement as to what kind of branches must be used, so some Orthodox believers use olive branches. Whatever the kind, these branches are blessed and distributed to

gether with candles either during the All-Night Vigil on the Eve of the Feast (Saturday night), or before the Divine Liturgy on Sunday morning. The Great Entrance of the Divine Liturgy commemorates the "Entry of the Lord into Jerusalem", so the meaningfulness of this moment is punctuated on Palm Sunday as everyone stands, holding their branches and lit candles. The faithful take these branches and candles home with them after the service, and keep them in their icon corner as an evloghia (blessing).

In Russia, donkey walk processions took place in different cities, but most importantly in Novgorod and, since 1558 until 1693, in Moscow. It was prominently featured in testimonies by foreign witnesses and mentioned in contemporary Western maps of the city. The Patriarch of Moscow, representing Christ, rode on a "donkey" (actually a horse draped in white cloth); the Tsar of Russia humbly led the procession on foot. Originally, Moscow processions began inside the Kremlin and terminated at Trinity Church, now known as Saint Basil's Cathedral, but in 1658 Patriarch Nikon reversed the order of procession. Peter I, as a part of his nationalisation of the church, terminated the custom; it has been occasionally recreated in the 21st century.

In Oriental Orthodox churches, palm fronds are distributed at the front of the church at the sanctuary steps, in India the sanctuary itself having been strewn with marigolds, and the congregation proceeds through and outside the church.

Western Christianity

In ancient times, palm branches symbolized goodness and victory. They were often depicted on coins and important buildings. Solomon had palm branches carved into the walls and doors of the temple (1 Kings 6:29). Again at the end of the Bible, people from every nation raise palm branches to honor Jesus (Revelation 7:9). Palm Sunday commemorates the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem (Matthew 21:1–9), when palm branches were placed in his path, before his arrest on Holy Thursday and his crucifixion on Good Friday. It thus marks the beginning of Holy Week, the final week of Lent. In the Roman Catholic Church, as well as among many Anglican and Lutheran congregations, palm fronds (or in colder climates some kind of substitutes) are blessed with an aspergillum outside the church building in an event called the "blessing of palms" if using palm leaves (or in cold climates in the narthex when Easter falls early in the year). A solemn procession also takes place, and may include the normal liturgical procession of clergy and acolytes, the parish choir, or the entire congregation. In the Catholic Church and the Episcopal Church, this feast now coincides with that of Passion Sunday, which is the focus of the Mass which follows the service of the blessing of palms. The palms are saved in many churches to be burned on Shrove Tuesday the following year to make ashes used in Ash Wednesday services. The Catholic Church considers the blessed palms to be sacramentals. The vestments for the day are deep scarlet red, the colour of blood, indicating the supreme redemptive sacrifice Christ was entering the city to fulfill: his Passion and Resurrection in Jerusalem. **CONTD. ON PAGE NO.06-**