

***Please Note: For March 28, there are two selections of Lectionary Texts. The first is for observing Palm Sunday while the second is for the observance of Passion Sunday.***

### **Lectionary of the Palms Texts**

Psalm 118:1-2, 19 - 29

Luke 19:28 – 40

### **Notes on the Gospel Text**

At first glance, Jesus' actions on this first Palm Sunday are curious. Bethany and Bethphage are on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. Bethphage is almost at the summit. Jerusalem lies to the west of the mountain. The road from Bethany to Jerusalem did not go over the summit but rather to the north of the mountain so that the climb would be less strenuous. Jesus walked up to the summit of the mountain and then rode down.

Jesus actions are best understood in light of prophecy from the Hebrew Scriptures. Most of us are familiar with the words of Zechariah 9:9 that read

*Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!  
Lo, your king comes to you;  
triumphant and victorious is he,  
humble and riding on a donkey,  
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*

Less familiar is Zechariah 14:4a which reads: *On that day, (the Lord's) feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east.* By the combination of these two passages, it was understood that the Messiah would enter Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives as he rode on a donkey.

When in the Galilee, Jesus would almost always caution those he had healed to not reveal who he was. Scholars refer to this as "the Messianic Secret". When Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, the "secret" was out. Everyone who saw the triumphal procession would know exactly what was being proclaimed.

This explains the Pharisees' reaction to the event. Jesus' actions on that day would surely bring the wrath of Rome down on his head but the Romans had a history of quelling dissent with broad strokes and not surgical precision. Who else might feel the power of Rome in response to this upstart? Yet Jesus would not relent. Anyone who has traveled to the Holy Land notices the overabundance of stones throughout the country. Jesus' words indicate that the noise of the crowd was but a whisper in comparison to the changes that would soon come.

## **Lectionary of the Passion Texts**

Isaiah 50:4 – 9a

Psalm 31: 9 -16

Philippians 2:5 – 11

Luke 22:14 – 23:56

or

Luke 23:1 – 49

## **Notes on the Epistle Lesson**

We do not know when Christians first began putting music to texts but it must have been very early in the church's history. Scholars believe that Paul wrote the letter to the church in Philippi somewhere around A.D. 61. Most of the passage from this Sunday's Epistle Lesson is believed to be quoted from a hymn with which the Philippians would have been familiar. This indicates the church had been creating hymns for some time within thirty years of Jesus' death and resurrection.

There is one line that does not seem to be a part of the original hymn. Indeed, Greek scholars have been known to lament its insertion as the rhythm of the text is markedly disrupted. The line is, "even death on a cross". Paul apparently inserted those words into the hymn for emphasis; an emphasis that is especially appropriate for Holy Week.

## **Notes on the Gospel Lesson**

Some notes on this week's text:

It is plain from Jesus' words that sharing this meal with his disciples was very important to him (Luke 22:15). How it must have grieved him to see them still arguing about which of them was the greatest (22:24).

Note that Jesus' arrest does not take place in the Garden of Gethsemane. Indeed, the phrase "Garden of Gethsemane" exists nowhere in the Bible. It is a post-biblical construction combining Matthew and Mark's description ("a place called Gethsemane") with Luke's ("the Mount of Olives") and John's (across the Kidron valley to a garden). The name "Gethsemane" actually refers to a small cave across the Kidron and on the Mount of Olives. The cave contained an olive press in the first century. The word "Gethsemane" comes from the Aramaic words for "olive press".

All too often the trial of Jesus is described as having occurred during the night. Luke 22:66 clearly states that his trial before the Council - or Sanhedrin - took place "When day came".

Luke gives the briefest account of Jesus' trials - both before the Council and before Pilate - of any of the gospel writers.

Luke 23: 12 states that Pilate and Herod Antipas became friends after encountering Jesus. This is usually depicted as a good thing. Nothing could be farther from the truth. First century accounts demonstrate that both men were cruel and brutal rulers. A twentieth century comparison would be the friendship between Adolph Hitler and Benito Mussolini.

Unique to Luke's account of the crucifixion are the encounter with the women on the way to the execution site, the repentant thief who was crucified along with Jesus, and Jesus' last words of "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."

Luke is more explicit than the other gospels that Jesus' burial was incomplete. There was no way for the women to finish the preparations for his entombment before the beginning of the Sabbath. This explains why the women returned to the tomb on Sunday morning; they had to finish the task. The photo (right) shows a preparation shelf (called an arcosolium) in a first century Jerusalem tomb on which a body was laid for wrapping and for the anointing with spices.

