

Celebrate the Lord!

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

29 March 2026

Children's Talk: Celebrate the Lord!

Why did we walk around the church, waving palm branches? It is because today is a special day called Palm Sunday. It is in memory of the day that people welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. When Jesus came to Jerusalem the people greeted Him with palm branches in their hands:

The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:

"Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!"

Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: Fear not, daughter of Zion;

Behold, your King is coming,

Sitting on a donkey's colt.

(John 12:12-15)

Why did the people do this? Perhaps it was to show their excitement that the Lord was coming to save them. That's actually what "hosanna!" means: "save us!"

When you are excited, isn't it fun to grab things and wave them around, to shout and yell, to run around? At someone's birthday party I'm sure you have done all these things. Well the people were that excited about the Lord coming. Imagine if they had just sat quietly by, and said: oh, isn't it nice that the Lord is coming; oh well. That would not have been a very good greeting for the Lord! They showed how much they cared about and loved Him.

We also can get excited about the Lord. When we come to church, we can sing the songs loudly and with joy. At school we move and sing as we praise the Lord. When holidays happen, like Christmas or Easter or New Church Day we get even more excited.

But there are other ways that we can show our excitement about the Lord and the fact that He can save us. It's not just at special church services. We can also get excited about the Lord in everyday life. When you aren't looking forward to chores

and helping mom and dad seems really boring, it can be exciting to remember that the Lord makes helping out joyful. It really is a wonderful and joyful thing that the Lord made us so that we can be helpful to other people.

When you are fighting with friends and nothing seems to be working, it can be exciting to remember that the Lord helps you solve problems. He can actually make it so that you can work things out with your friends, forgive and ask for forgiveness, change how you are behaving, and get back to having fun. That is so wonderful and joyful!

There are many ways that having the Lord can be a joyful thing that is worth celebrating. We can look forward to learning from the Lord, and doing what He says, and feeling His love, and welcome Him with joy and excitement into our lives, just like the people of Israel did with shouts and by waving palm branches so many thousands of years ago.

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Our focus today is Palm Sunday as recorded in the Gospel of John. When it comes to Palm Sunday John, uniquely among the Gospel writers, places Palm Sunday firmly in the context of the resurrection of Lazarus, Jesus' friend who had died and then been brought back to life. This link given by John can help us understand how the miraculous things the Lord has brought to life for us can lead us to a joyful acceptance of the Lord, or on the contrary, inspire fear and doubt.

To recap the story of Lazarus, Jesus had heard he was sick and on the point of death. Jesus delayed coming to him, and so Lazarus died. When Jesus finally did arrive Lazarus had been dead and buried for days. Lazarus sisters despaired that if Jesus had been there, He could have prevented the death; but now it was too late. Yet Jesus went to the tomb, and had them roll away the stone, and called to Lazarus to come out, which he did, alive and well.

Raising someone from the dead is one of Jesus' greatest miracles, and the people who witnessed it or heard about it had two main reactions. The first is to be expected: people began to believe in Jesus. The other is less expected: people began to be fearful and angry:

Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation." (John 11:45-48)

And a little later in the story:

Now a great many of the Jews knew that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He had raised from the dead. But the chief priests plotted to put Lazarus to death also, because on account of him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus. (John 12:9-11)

Many people were excited to see this person who could even raise the dead, but the chief priests became so scared that the people would believe in Jesus because of bringing back Lazarus from the dead, they plotted to kill Lazarus, to remove the evidence of the miracle. It was in this atmosphere of growing faith and fear that Palm Sunday took place.

Let's start with the first group, the ones who, having known about Jesus miracles, joyfully welcomed Him as their king. The night before Jesus ate with Lazarus and his two sisters. The next day He entered Jerusalem, to be greeted by the crowds:

The next day a great multitude that had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm trees and went out to meet Him, and cried out:

“Hosanna! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord! The King of Israel!”

Then Jesus, when He had found a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written: Fear not, daughter of Zion;

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Essentially, the people greeted Jesus as a king by waving palm fronds as He entered the city. This simple description is deepened by the context of the story of Lazarus. These people greeted the Lord this way specifically because they had witnessed the miracle of resurrection.

Therefore the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of his tomb and raised him from the dead, bore witness. For this reason the people also met Him, because they heard that He had done this sign. (John 12:17-18)

They knew first hand, or had heard directly, of the spiritual power that Jesus had over death. It was from this reality that they were able to confess the Lord and accept Him as their King who would save them.

I want to spend some time thinking about this. These weren't just random crowds. They had seen and heard specific things about Jesus, and it was those things that directly led them to celebrate Him as their king. It's worthwhile, at times, to reflect on the things we have known and experienced of the Lord in our lives, so that we too can celebrate them and Him. If the Lord hadn't done *that* for me, I wouldn't be this or have this today. The easiest places to spot the miracle of the Lord's life is by reflecting on the evils that He has overcome within us. We all have them: selfish desire, overwhelming pride, disdain for others or simply serving self. These are the things that kill our spirit. And when we succumb to them, we certainly can feel dead to the Lord. Yet He can, and has, revived us. When the moment passes and life gets back to normal we can take for granted just how much we need the Lord and just how much of a difference He has made. We have to bear witness to the ways that He has done; we have to remind ourselves again and again where we would be without Him. When our acknowledgment or trust in the Lord comes not just from the mind but from the heart, it takes on power, even the power to save. That is what the people proclaimed when they welcomed the Lord: Hosanna! Save us!

There is also significance in the fact that they waved palm branches and laid them on the road before Jesus. This is because palm branches symbolize or correspond to the truths that allow us to acknowledge the Lord.

Holding palm branches in the hands symbolizes confessions springing from Divine truths because palm branches symbolize Divine truths...
It can be seen also from the fact that when Jesus came to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, the people "took palm branches and went to meet Him, crying, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!'" (John 12:12, 13)
These symbolize a confession of the Lord springing from Divine truths.
(*Apocalypse Revealed* §367)

When we have seen the Lord at work in life, we can then see the truths that point to Him; truths about the power of forgiveness, the nature of unconditional love, complete and utter trust in providence, and on and on. When we have known the touch of the Lord's life, these truths become real in a new and powerful way, and we see them as if for the first time. This is what is symbolized in those who had seen and heard of the resurrection of Lazarus greeting Jesus with palm branches and acknowledging Him as their king.

Yet not everyone had this reaction. And the truth is that while experiencing the Lord's power is essential to being led to acknowledging Him, it does not happen automatically. We have a free choice in the matter, and there are various fears that stand in the way of making that choice. As already mentioned, some plotted against Jesus and Lazarus, for fear that belief in Him would take away their influence with the people. Others feared for their reputation, in spite of believing in the Lord:

Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.
(John 12:42-43)

There can be a part of us that has a similar reaction. The hells can inspire the fear that maybe the Lord's way is not best after all. That perhaps once we have made the sacrifices it takes to live for the neighbour, there will be nothing left for us. That life will become devoid of joy, a mere chore to get through. We also face the fear that perhaps when we follow the Lord, we will look foolish in the eyes of our peers. We may appear weak, or naïve, or simplistic. There's also the pride that says we have done all the hard work, not the Lord: it was our own effort that made the biggest difference; why should the Lord get all the credit? Another part of us doesn't want to be made well: it would rather wallow in self-righteous misery, or be permitted to hold on to resentment towards others. These voices of hell creep in and prevent us from

joyfully confessing and acknowledging the Lord, in spite of all that He has done for us.

These two reactions create tension within us: on the one hand, our past experiences testify to the Lord's power to help and save us in the present moment; on the other hand a part of us cynically dismisses those past experiences or refuses to apply them to the present moment. Many times we cannot help having both reactions within us, although we may feel a greater pull one way or the other. We should not take for granted though that we can choose the former over the latter: we do not have to wait until some inner excitement and hope overpowers our pessimism or selfishness. Even when we are not "feeling" it we can choose to be like those who took palm branches and made a path for the Lord. We can remind ourselves of what the Lord has indeed done for us in the past, or even ask others to help us remember those things; focus on the truths that we have lived, not just the ones we have heard or remain intellectual ideas; and then lastly, as much as we can, look to the Lord. It won't make our doubts go away or fix everything; but it will create an entry point through which the Lord can come into our hearts and minds, and save us.