

Passover was the most important festival in the Jewish calendar. It was obligatory for all Jewish males to attend the ceremonies at the temple if they possibly could, and so hundreds of thousands of Jews would converge on Jerusalem at this time of year from all over the country and even from across the world. Jesus and his disciples, as dutiful Jews would be amongst the crowd heading for Jerusalem, but this year was different. Jesus knew that this time he would be facing arrest, torture and death. Jesus didn't shrink back, however, but with determined steps he went forward knowing this was all part of the determined plan and foreknowledge of God that he should offer up his life as a sacrifice for our sins.

Up until now he had not publicly declared that he was the Messiah, the king of the Jews, the very Son of God sent into the world to be the Saviour of the world. He had left his words and deeds and miracles to speak for themselves, and allowed people to come to their own conclusions. But now, just before his death, it was time to make a public statement. All the prophecies of the OT pointed to Jesus as being the Messiah, such as the place and the manner of his birth and the many miracles he performed, but now he would consciously go about to fulfil one of the prophecies that all Jews accepted as referring to the Messiah; - that is the prophecy in Zechariah 9 which says, "*Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.*"

Jesus sent two of his disciples on ahead to find a suitable donkey. Jesus could have possessed his own donkey. It would have been a great help to him as he travelled around the countryside on his preaching ministry, but Jesus purposely made himself poor. He possessed nothing and borrowed everything that he needed. Jesus told them, "*Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to Me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them*". Jesus was totally in control, knowing not only that there would be a suitable donkey waiting for him, but that his owners would be willing to lend him out. It was a foal – a young animal that had never been ridden. Normally it takes time to break a new animal in, but even in the midst of an excited and noisy crowd the animal calmly allowed Jesus to ride on it. Horses were only ridden in times of war, but rulers used donkeys at other times. King David offered Solomon his own donkey when he was inaugurated as king. (1 Kings 1:33).

Jesus timed his entry perfectly as well. Many have calculated that this was the exact day that Daniel prophesied about when he wrote "*from the issuing of a decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince there will be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks*" Also, this was the 10th day of the month, the day on which the law of Moses stated the Israelites were to take a lamb to be sacrificed on the 14th day – the Day of Atonement. Jesus was presenting himself as the sacrificial lamb – "*the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" as John the Baptist had earlier described Jesus. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 5 "*Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed*"

The crowd, of course, had no idea he was going to lay down his life and offer himself as the sacrificial lamb of God. They simply welcomed him as their Messiah who they hoped would be a conquering king who was about to rule supreme in Jerusalem and throw off the Roman yoke. And so we read, *"Most of the crowd spread their coats in the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them in the road. The crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David; blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest!"* They welcomed him like a conquering king, and the spreading of coats was traditionally a sign of loyalty and support. We find an example of it in 2 Kings 9: *"they hurried and each man took his garment and placed it under him on the bare steps, and blew the trumpet, saying, "Jehu is king!"* Quintus Curtius recorded the scattering of flowers in the way of Alexander the Great when he entered Babylon. We are not talking about a handful of disciples here, but a vast crowd would have witnessed this event – thousands if not tens of thousands of people gathering at Jerusalem for the festival. The Pharisees commented, *"Look the world has gone after him."* (John 12:19) We call it the Triumphal Entry and it was indeed a triumph of humility over pride, of poverty over affluence; and of peacefulness over hatred and warfare.

Not everyone was rejoicing that day. Luke records, *"Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But Jesus answered, "I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!"* Jesus was so certain he was fulfilling the purposes of God at the right time in the right place that absolutely nothing could prevent it from happening. But the jealous Pharisees set about to plot his downfall. It seems amazing that they could so poison the minds of the people and stir up prejudice against him that just a few days later the crowd were no longer calling out for his coronation but for his crucifixion.

One final thought. If Jesus were to walk into this church right now, would you be amongst those shouting 'Hosanna' and casting your coats before him as a sign of loyalty, or would you side with the Pharisees in wanting to get rid of him as quickly as possible?