# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

**“Enter the King”**

**John 12:12-19**

**April 10, 2022**

About 160 years before Jesus was born, there lived in Israel a Jewish man named Judah Maccabeus. During his time the Seleucid Empire controlled the city of Jerusalem. Judah gathered an army of Jewish men who fought against and defeated the Seleucid occupiers. In 163BC he entered Jerusalem riding a massive stallion, and the people waved palm branches and cried out, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” Palm branches were abundant in Israel, and they were used as a symbol of Jewish nationalism. We could compare them to waving American flags during nationalistic celebrations in our country, such as the fourth of July.

Judah Maccabeus was their conquering hero, and many thought he was the Jewish Messiah spoken of by prophets long ago. When he and his men entered the city, they cleaned out the false gods of the Seleucids from the temple, burned incense and offered sacrifices of thanksgiving to God for their victory, and lit a huge menorah that burned for eight days. To this day our Jewish friends observe eight days of the Festival of Lights, or Hanukkah, to celebrate this event. However, within three years of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, Judah was killed in battle.

Now, about two hundred years after Judah Maccabeus, Jesus enters Jerusalem, and the crowd welcomes him in much the same way. Judah clearly wasn’t their Messiah for, while he had won a great victory, Israel was soon occupied once more, this time by the Romans. Perhaps Jesus would do better. I invite you to turn with me to John 12:12-19

The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted, “Praise God!Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!”Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said: “Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey’s colt.” His disciples didn’t understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him. Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and they were telling others about it. That was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign. Then the Pharisees said to each other, “There’s nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him!”

The stories of Judah Maccabeus and Jesus entering Jerusalem are similar except for one important detail. When Judah entered the city, he was mounted on a war horse signifying conquest and victory in the battle of one nation against another. When Jesus entered the city, he was riding a young donkey signifying peace for all nations. His manner of entry fulfilled Zechariah’s prophecy, part of which is quoted by John in our text. Let me read the fuller prophecy from Zechariah 9:9-10

Rejoice, O people of Zion!Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey—riding on a donkey’s colt. I will remove the battle chariots from Israel and the warhorses from Jerusalem. I will destroy all the weapons used in battle, and your king will bring peace to the nations.

When Zechariah gave this prophecy from God, some 550 years before Jesus rode into Jerusalem, Israel had no king. They had been defeated by the Babylonian army, taken into exile hundreds of miles from their homeland, and they felt lost and abandoned by God. But, Zechariah proclaimed, there is hope, for God has made a promise and he will do what he has promised. One day he will give you a King and this King will be the only King you will ever need. This King will not be a king of battle chariots and war horses and battle weapons. He is a King who will bring peace to the nations of the world.

God the Father has a plan for our world and his plan is being carried out through his Son, Jesus. This world in which we live is not out of control, much as it may feel that way to us. God has not been caught off guard. He is not pleased, but he has a plan. Jesus came the first time to invite all people to live God’s way, the way of peace and justice, and he will come again. When he comes the second time it will be on a metaphorical horse, as the book of Revelation tells us, signaling conquest and the final defeat of all the enemies of God.

In the meantime, you and I follow a King who rides a young donkey, an animal much lower to the ground than a great war horse. He comes to us at our level, a human being like us. He is an approachable King, inviting the little children to come to him. You and I need to take our place with him and be approachable. Like him, we are humble, not lording it over others or using ungodly means to force our beliefs or opinions on others. The truth is that some of us need to get off our high horse and get down to where Jesus works and lives. Then we will have the opportunity to invite people to join us in welcoming Jesus as King of their lives, even as we have welcomed him to be the King of our lives.