



## Background

Palm Sunday marks the occasion when Jesus “set his face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51) for the last time and rode into the city seated on a donkey amid the welcome and cheers of the crowd. While the date of Palm Sunday changes from year to year, for all Christians it marks the beginning of Holy Week.

The Gospel of John notes how the people of Jerusalem welcomed Jesus with palm branches (John 12:13). Palm trees were in abundance in the Mediterranean and were even found on ancient coins. After the Maccabean Revolt (167–160 AD), the Jews re-dedicated the Temple carrying palm branches (1 Macc. 13:51). In Revelation 7:9, people from all nations use palm branches in their worship of Jesus. All four Gospels provide an account of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:1–11; Mark 11:1–10; Luke 19:28–38; John 12:12–18).

Many churches initiate the Palm Sunday service with a procession that represents Jesus’ procession into Jerusalem. This practice is attested to as early as in the 4th century in the *Pilgrimage of Egeria*.

## Poems, verses and sayings

### Palm Sunday

Hark! how the children shrill and high  
Hosanna cry,  
Their joys provoke the distant sky,  
Where thrones and seraphims reply,  
And their own angels shine and sing  
In a bright ring:  
Such young, sweet mirth  
Makes heaven and earth  
Join in a joyful symphony.

Henry Vaughan (1622–1695)

## Palm Sunday

Now to the gate of my Jerusalem,  
The seething holy city of my heart,  
The saviour comes. But will I welcome him?  
Oh crowds of easy feelings make a start;  
They raise their hands, get caught up in the singing,  
And think the battle won. Too soon they'll find  
The challenge, the reversal he is bringing  
Changes their tune. I know what lies behind  
The surface flourish that so quickly fades;  
Self-interest, and fearful guardedness,  
The hardness of the heart, its barricades,  
And at the core, the dreadful emptiness  
Of a perverted temple. Jesus come  
Break my resistance and make me your home.

Malcom Guite

No pain, no palm; no thorns, no throne; no gall, no glory; no cross, no crown.

William Penn

Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in.

Psalm 24:7

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! We bless you from the house of the Lord. The Lord is God, and he has made his light to shine upon us.

Psalm 118:26-27a

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you; righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

Zechariah 9:9

When Christ entered into Jerusalem the people spread garments in the way: when He enters into our hearts, we pull off our own righteousness, and not only lay it under Christ's feet but even trample upon it ourselves.

Augustus Toplady

## The Donkey

When fishes flew and forests walked  
And figs grew upon thorn,  
Some moment when the moon was blood  
Then surely I was born;

With monstrous head and sickening cry  
And ears like errant wings,  
The devil's walking parody  
On all four-footed things.

The tattered outlaw of the earth,  
Of ancient crooked will;  
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,  
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour;  
One far fierce hour and sweet:  
There was a shout about my ears,  
And palms before my feet.

G.K. Chesterton (1874–1936)

## Palm Sunday

Along the pilgrim way they went  
    where seers and saints had trod,  
he sensed the blessing of pure hearts  
    that look upon their God.

They cheered and laughed along the road,  
    Hosannas thick and fast,  
but he wasn't fooled by human praise  
    he knew the first was last.

He did not watch how Judas scowled  
    or dote on Peter's smile,  
he simply did what he was asked  
    and went the second mile.

The pilgrim crowd were on a high,  
    their palms a waving mass,  
he went in trust all of the way  
    though he was just an ass.

*B.D. Prewer 1991*

Both Chesterton and Prewer seek to capture Palm Sunday from the perspective of the donkey that Jesus rode.