

# Holy Trinity Lutheran Church Des Moines, WA April 1, 2012 - Palm Sunday

**Zechariah 9:9-12**

**Rejoice! Your King is Coming!**

- 1. A different kind of King**
- 2. A different kind of kingdom**

**Hymns: 131 (1-4) – 133 – Distribution: 124, 122 –  
Closing: 131 (5)**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV 1984

***Zechariah 9:9-12 –***

***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. <sup>10</sup> I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. <sup>11</sup> As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. <sup>12</sup> Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.***

In the name of the coming King, dear prisoners of hope,

“GEE-LEE!” Zechariah tells us today. Rejoice! Exult! And “HA-REE-YEE!” Make noise! Make noise with your voice or with an instrument! But today?

Palm Sunday always used to confuse me when I was growing up. It seemed out of place. Here we are, six Sundays into Lent. Our church services have had a somber mood. We have been reading Scripture lessons about the suffering and death of Jesus. We have been singing serious hymns in minor keys. We have

recounted the Passion History of Christ on Wednesday nights. Lent is not over, and in fact, darkest days lie ahead. Yet today, on the Sunday on which we begin Holy Week, the culmination of the arrest, trial, and murder of the Son of God, we’re told to rejoice!

Undoubtedly, it seems to feel like a Sunday of rejoicing so far. Our school students set the tone for the day with their opening anthem and their palm branches. The first hymns were festive and loud. And our reading before us today instructs us to “Rejoice!” and “Shout!”

But today? Why not after Easter Sunday when Alleluias return? Is this April Fools material?

To answer that question, we are going to focus on the OT reading for today, Zechariah 9:9-12, and see why rejoicing is in order for this day.

## **Background –**

A word that you can keep in mind as we look at this text from Zechariah is “beginnings.” It certainly was a new beginning for God’s OT people to whom Zechariah was writing. Zechariah wrote these words about 500 B.C. He is called a “post-exilic” prophet, meaning that his ministry took place after the exile of God’s OT people to Babylon. You might recall how God’s OT people forsook him for other gods time after time as they followed wicked kings. They had even split the nation of Israel in two parts, the north and the south. After centuries of their rebellion and unbelief, God allowed his people to be carried off into captivity, the northern kingdom in 722 B.C. by Assyria (never to return) and the southern kingdom in 586 B.C. by Babylon.

After 70 years, as God’s prophets had rightly predicted, the Persian king Cyrus issued a decree that they could return to Palestine, their homeland, and begin their life there again. What rejoicing there must have been at that decree! What joy in packing up to return the hundreds of miles across the Fertile Crescent back to Canaan. But their joy was soon turned to depression – Perhaps like when you receive a piece of mail that says you’re an instant winner,

but opening the envelope and reading the material tell you otherwise.

What happened to their joy? When they returned to Canaan, they found a mess. Everything was in shambles and in need of rebuilding. Jerusalem was still rubble. Worst of all, Solomon's temple was utterly destroyed. Some leaders got them fired up to rebuild and renovate the run-down city and the temple, but that became disappointing again. What they were doing was a shadow of what had been. Their neighbors did everything in their power to keep the work from moving forward. It took a long time. By this time, 14 years had elapsed and work on the temple had come to a standstill. They were experiencing extreme political and theological disappointment. What next? Where was the Lord? Would he come back to them? After all, they had originally blown it! What would happen now? What did the future hold for them?

## 1. A different kind of King

At that depressing time, the words of our text enter the picture: "Rejoice! Your King is coming!" It was a new beginning.

As a side note, we have to understand the role of the king in OT times. Americans have traditionally had a low view of kings. In fact, the reason our country was formed was to get out from under the tyranny of a king. We revel in our democratic system. However, most of the history of the world has had kings that rule over countries. When the king was good, this was a blessing to the common people. When there was no influential king keeping control, there was great danger of lawlessness and anarchy.

Zechariah wrote, *"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."* **This is a different kind of King!** We see three adjectives to describe him:

**GENTLE** – This is a strong word. It is even translated "afflicted" in the familiar Lenten verse from Isaiah that describes the suffering Savior as "stricken, smitten, and afflicted." He is pictured as riding into the scene on a donkey. Donkeys actually were the animals of choice for kings in OT times. King Saul and King David rode on donkeys. But by the time Jesus rode into Jerusalem, kings would normally be found riding on much more elegant things: Chariots, steeds, chairs that were carried. But Christ would come on a donkey as prophesied.

**RIGHTEOUS** – This would be a reason to rejoice, wouldn't it be? This is a king who does everything right. He has standards. He does everything right according to the uncompromising law of God. He will be unlike other kings who are unfair and unjust. He is different from kings that make decisions based on bribes or political advantage. He does not have moral lapses or scandals. He is upright among a group that is known for its abuse of power and its corruption. This is reason to rejoice!

**HAVING SALVATION ("SAVED")** – This is the most mysterious of the three adjectives. Literally, it says that this king is "saved." How could that be true of the Messiah?

This makes sense when we think about the attitude with which our Savior served, shown us in the Second Lesson today. He came to fulfill his Father's plan as he humbled and emptied himself of his own glory. How far did he empty himself? Hebrews 5 says, *"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."* 1 Peter 2 says, *"When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."*

When Jesus allowed himself to be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, silently endured the torturous treatment at his trials, and let himself be crucified, he placed himself in his

Father's hands. He drank the cup that was placed before him. And he was saved in the end, as God the Father raised him from the dead and exalted him back to his rightful place. The word "saved" in this line of thought really shows us what "salvation" is all about.

Why is this type of King important to us? Why is this reason to rejoice as he appears on the scene today? Because we have not been humble. We have not remembered the words of Philippians 2: *"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others."*

We have ridden onto the scene many days on our high horse, having only our own interests in mind. We have said, in essence, "Me first!" "Look at me!" "My needs are most important!" "I'm number 1!"

This is also important because by nature we are not "righteous." The type of king described before – perfect and holy – does not describe us in the least.

And "saved?" Hardly. *"The wages of sin is death."* (Romans 6) By nature we are *"objects of wrath"* (Ephesians 2). We need a new beginning. **We need the exact King and Savior that has ridden on the scene! And in our depressing circumstances, here he is!**

## 2. A different kind of kingdom

Zechariah gives us another reason to rejoice on this Palm Sunday. He goes on to describe the kingdom of this King that has come on the scene. What will his kingdom be like? After all, you have probably learned about many kings from history who have not had their subjects' welfare in mind. Such kings who are concerned only about their power or their pleasure are not a blessing to their subjects. What will this King's kingdom be like? *"As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit. Return to your fortress, O prisoners of hope; even now I*

*announce that I will restore twice as much to you."*

**We see that this King brings about a kingdom of rescue.** Whom does he rescue? Those in the "waterless pit." There are two people in the Bible that are thrown into waterless pits. Can you name them? One was Joseph, thrown in the pit by his own brothers. The other was Jeremiah, thrown into a pit by the religious leaders of the OT who were not on God's side and thus opposed Jeremiah's message. Although we can't read the hearts and intentions of the men who threw them there, it could very well be that they intended for them to die in those pits, never to come out. Can you imagine being in that situation?

I've seen a few movies that have POWs in some pretty dire situations. Solitary confinement. Cages and torture. Approaching death. Can you imagine being in such a situation? Who are the prisoners in the waterless pit? They certainly were the OT people that Zechariah spoke to, who would continue to wait for the King for 500 more years. But there are more prisoners, for these words are spoken to us.

Why can we be prisoners of hope? Why is deliverance possible? *"Because of the blood of my covenant with you."* It's interesting that this is the only place that this term is used in the OT except for one other reference – Exodus 24. There it says, *"Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, 'We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.' Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'"*

The blood of the covenant is the blood of the Savior that those OT figures pointed ahead to. It was the plan all along. Its fulfillment is what we commemorate this Lent and will commemorate directly later this week in our Maundy Thursday and Good Friday services. It is the blood of his suffering and death that pays for your sins. It is your hope for rescue.

Through this blood, Zechariah says the prisoners can return to the fortress. How welcome wouldn't those words be to a prisoner of war. He can return to headquarters! He is safe again and in good hands. God also says to the prisoners who have been undergoing the misery of their own sinful condition that they will receive double for their sins. Wow! What a comforting picture! This is a picture that we see in the life of Job as God blessed him with double of all his original blessings after he went through his sufferings. It's reminiscent of Isaiah 40, which says, *"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins."*

What other aspect of the King's kingdom do we see in our text? We see the result of this rescue: *"I will take away the chariots from Ephraim and the war-horses from Jerusalem, and the battle bow will be broken. He will proclaim peace to the nations. His rule will extend from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth."*  
**This will be a kingdom of utter peace.**

This is a remarkable prophecy to a nation that had a constant history of war! From Egypt to their wilderness wanderings to the conquest of the Promised Land and beyond, they had had a history of war. But the coming kingdom would be one of disarmament. There would be no more weapons of war available! Peace would exist between them and their God in their country. Peace would be available for the entire world, to the ends of the earth! **The spiritual peace the King would bring in his kingdom would be unlike any other peace known to man! What a new beginning to rejoice in, as man and God's relationship would be restored!**

As we hear and believe about these amazing truths, we realize that life is never the same after tasting of the rescue and peace that this King brings. That is what we are doing today – Peace-tasting. And it is intoxicating. After having that beginning, intoxicating taste of this

peace, we come back each week to taste more. That is what we do each week, isn't it? We take a few select verses out of their place in Scripture, look at them through the light, swirl them around, sniff, and taste their richness. And then we go back into the world of disillusionment, disappointment, and lack of peace – a world that only views Christ as a defeated martyr who died for a cause and nothing more. Yet we go back with the sweet taste of God's rescue and peace still in our mouths, savoring it as it lingers until the next Sunday when we refresh its flavor.

This message gives us special reason to rejoice today. For seeing this promise of God in its complete context from the time of Zechariah, we see that it is just beginning. A preacher might wonder why he should preach on the OT text on Palm Sunday. After all, don't we want to get to the real story that happened in the gospels? But today, we see a wider reason to rejoice. We see the promises of God in fuller context, from 500 years before Christ and on into eternity at the final celebration.

The Son of God has come to Jerusalem do his Father's will. He will not leave us as orphans. It is all beginning. And it will begin again on Easter Day in a new phase of God's grace.

And finally, it will all lead to another beginning. Perhaps these words are familiar to you: *"After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" (Revelation 7)* That life in heaven will be a new beginning.

Today, may we rejoice in the King who comes, who is different than any other. And may we rejoice in the kingdom that he brings, also unlike any other. Rejoice! It's just beginning! Amen.