

# PALM SUNDAY

## RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS

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## PALM SUNDAY

The Gospel stories in the Christian New Testament (NT) of the entry of Jesus to Jerusalem on a donkey on what is now called Palm Sunday, are well known.

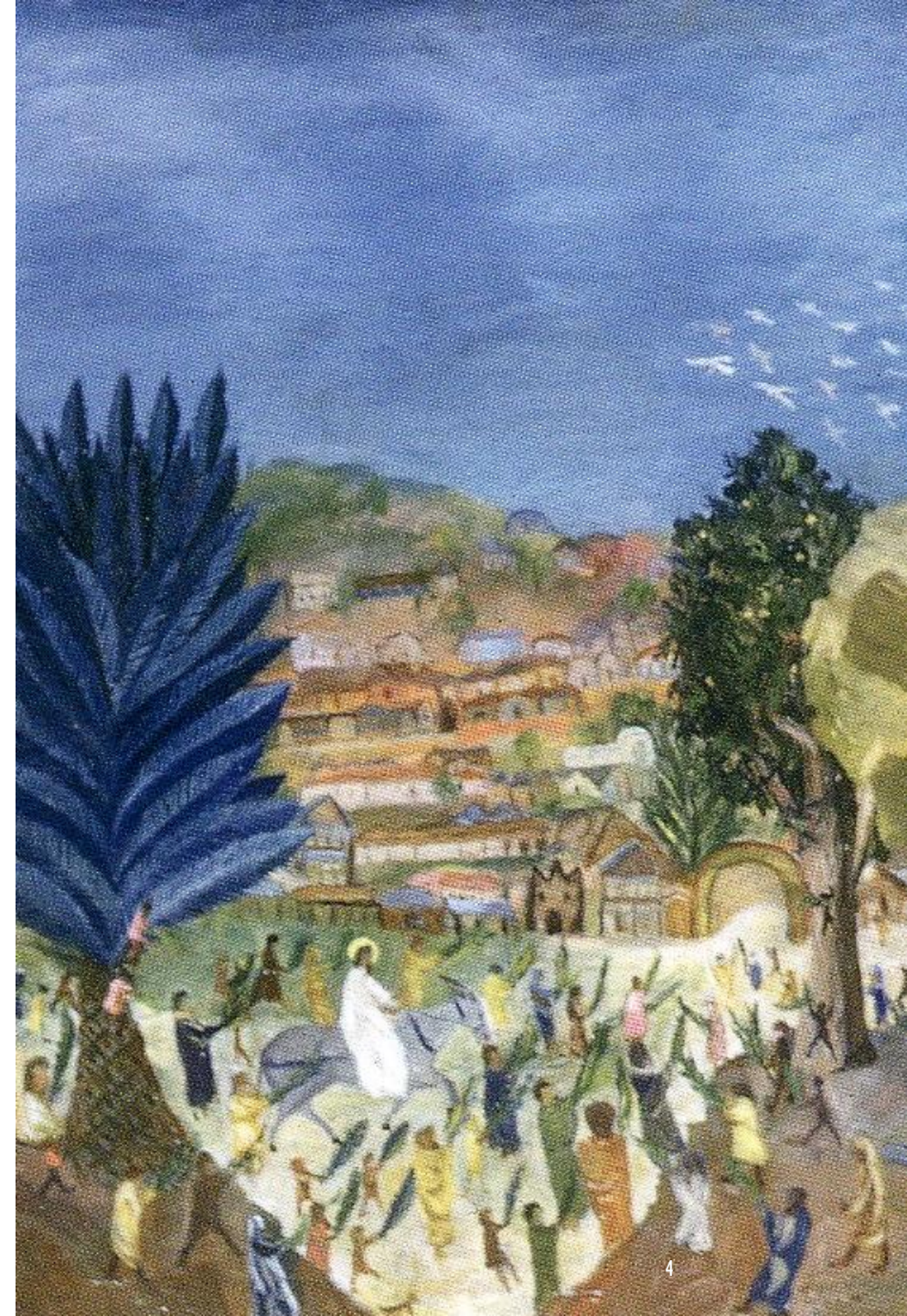
The New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John describe how crowds of people travelling into Jerusalem for the Jewish Passover festival responded to Jesus when they saw him riding a donkey into the city. It's the *only* story about Jesus in all 4 Gospels.

## LESSON ONE



# THE PALM SUNDAY STORY

- People gathered tree branches to wave and spread at the feet of Jesus along with their cloaks (John mentions palm leaves) (Mk 11:7-8; Mt 21:8; Lk 19:35-36; Jn 12:13)
- The crowds also shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!' (Mk 11:10; Mt 21:9; Jn 12:13)



# SEQUENCE OF EVENTS\*

- Jesus and his disciples arrive at a place near Jerusalem and arrange to borrow a donkey
- Jesus enters Jerusalem riding on the donkey and is greeted by crowds going into the city to celebrate the Passover festival
- When Jesus enters the city, he enters the Temple and drives out the money changers, and then leaves the city for Bethany
- He then returns to the Temple and for that week gives his most provocative teaching against the religious leaders of the day (the 'Seven Woes' (Mt 23))
- On Friday Jesus is crucified.

\*The other gospels have a slightly different sequence to Matthew's.

# TELL OR ENACT PALM SUNDAY — MT 21:1-11

- **Read aloud** Matthew's account of Jesus' riding on a donkey to Jerusalem on the next slide
- For younger primary school children, this could be read out by the teacher seated with the children in a circle on the floor
- Older primary school children could **act out** the Palm Sunday story whilst speaking different parts (either as part of the R.E. lesson or for a school assembly — see Slide 10)
- Secondary students could volunteer to read the story aloud: either one or two students or more speaking the different parts (see [Slide 10](#)).

# MATT 21:1-11

1 When they had approached Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus then sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, “Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied there and a colt with it. Untie them and bring them to Me. 3 And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, ‘The Lord needs them,’ and he will send them on immediately.” 4 Now this took place so that what was spoken through the prophet would be fulfilled:

5 “Say to the daughter of Zion, ‘Behold your King is coming to you, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’”

6 The disciples went and did just as Jesus had instructed them, 7 and brought the donkey and the colt, and laid their cloaks on them; and He sat on the cloaks. 8 Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others were cutting branches from the trees and spreading them on the road. 9 Now the crowds going ahead of Him, and those who followed, were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest!”

10 When He had entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, “Who is this?” 11 And the crowds were saying, “This is Jesus the prophet, from Nazareth in Galilee.”

# WHAT DOES 'HOSANNA' MEAN?

Slides 8-9 can be used for younger primary students

On Palm Sunday, Christians often say and hear the word “Hosanna”, but what does that actually mean?

It’s much more than just a simple cheer like, “Hooray!” or “Woohoo!”

The word Hosanna tells us something about **who Jesus is**.

- Chat to another student about what you think ‘Hosanna’ might mean (what do you think the people meant when they shouted this on Palm Sunday?). It’s okay to just take a guess or say something silly!
- In your pairs, **draw a picture together** of what the word ‘Hosanna’ could mean.

# WHAT DOES 'HOSANNA'\* MEAN?

Slides 8-9 can be used for younger primary students

- Watch this video
- In your pairs, chat about what Douglas the puppet says 'Hosanna' means
- Draw another picture together of what you think 'Hosanna' means after listening to Douglas
- Show your drawings to another pair of students
- Explain to each other what you think the word 'Hosanna' tells us about **who Jesus is**



Source: <https://douglastalks.com/what-does-hosanna-mean-palm-sunday-lesson-for-kids/>

\* Please see [Slide 30](#) for a more detailed explanation of the two words that have been translated into Greek as "Hosanna".

# ACTING OUT PALM SUNDAY

This slide (Slide 10) can be used for older primary students

Ask the students to decide amongst themselves who will take the following roles:

- The narrator of Matthew's Gospel
- Jesus
- The prophet Zachariah
- The disciples (non-speaking roles)
- The crowds (all the remaining students)

- Find or make props: palm leaves and coats (or jumpers) & a donkey!
- If you have time, make costumes
- Teacher organizes the students to proceed from one side of the classroom to the other, enacting the story of Jesus traveling with his disciples from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem. Or nominate a student to be the director.

## 2 QUESTIONS: PALM SUNDAY

The remaining slides can be used or adapted for older primary students & secondary students

It's possible to ask **many different questions** about the **meaning** of the Palm Sunday story. Here we'll just **focus on two**.

- Why did Jesus choose to do what he did in the Palm Sunday story?
- Why did the crowds of people greet Jesus in the way they did?

To dig into these questions, we need to **inquire into**:

- The background of Palm Sunday: **the Roman empire**
- The **Hebrew Bible** in the Palm Sunday story



## POLITICAL CONTEXT: ROMAN EMPIRE

In Jesus' day, Judea was a province of the Roman Empire.

At the time of Palm Sunday, the Roman official, Pontius Pilate, was military governor (26-36 CE) of Judea.

The Jewish people felt oppressed and longed to be free from Roman rule.

# PILATE THE ROMAN GOVERNOR: ARCHEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE



- A limestone block (82cm wide by 68cm high) was found in 1961 engraved with the name 'Pontius Pilate' and stating his role as 'prefect of Judea'.
- This provides concrete archeological evidence that Pontius Pilate existed and was the governor of Judea as the Bible says.

# PILATE THE ROMAN GOVERNOR

- Rome was on guard against any sign of rebellion against their rule.
- Pilate came to Jerusalem with his army only during the important festivals to clamp down on unrest or uprisings when the large crowds sparked nationalistic activism.
- The fact that the most important Jewish festival Passover, which commemorates the liberation of the Hebrew people from a foreign ruler when they were slaves in Egypt, was approaching would have heightened the tensions between Roman authorities and the Jewish people in Jerusalem on the day that Jesus entered the city on a donkey.

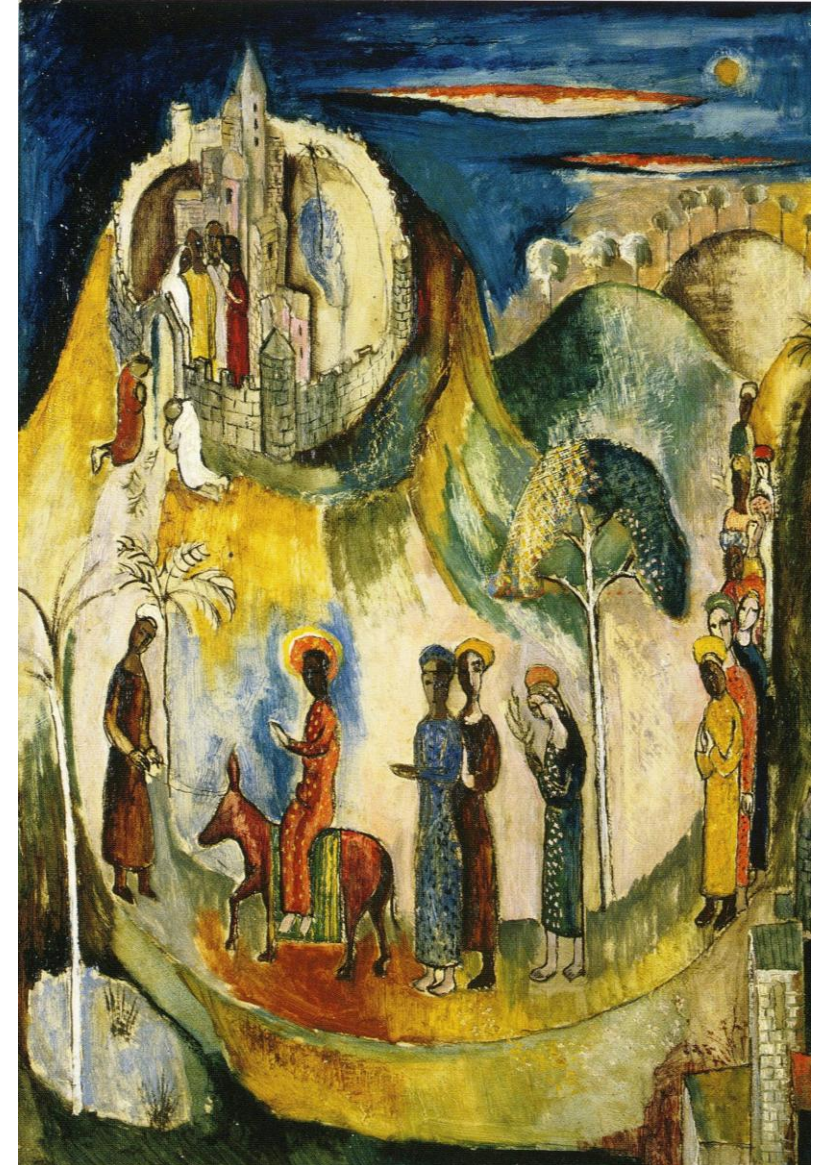
Source: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jesus/Jewish-Palestine-at-the-time-of-Jesus>

# CAIAPHAS THE HIGH PRIEST

- For the rest of the year, Pilate relied on local Jewish leaders to govern Judea on a day-to-day basis.
- Jewish leaders had a close relationship with Roman authorities.
- The high priest during Jesus' public career was Caiaphas who was tasked with making sure taxes were paid to Rome and maintaining order.

# PALM SUNDAY: A DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENT

- Clearly, Jesus was confronted by **dangers on several fronts**: from Rome, from the religious leaders of his community and from not meeting ordinary Jewish expectations.
- Roman authorities might think he was a rebel stirring up an uprising against the rule of the Roman Empire in their country.



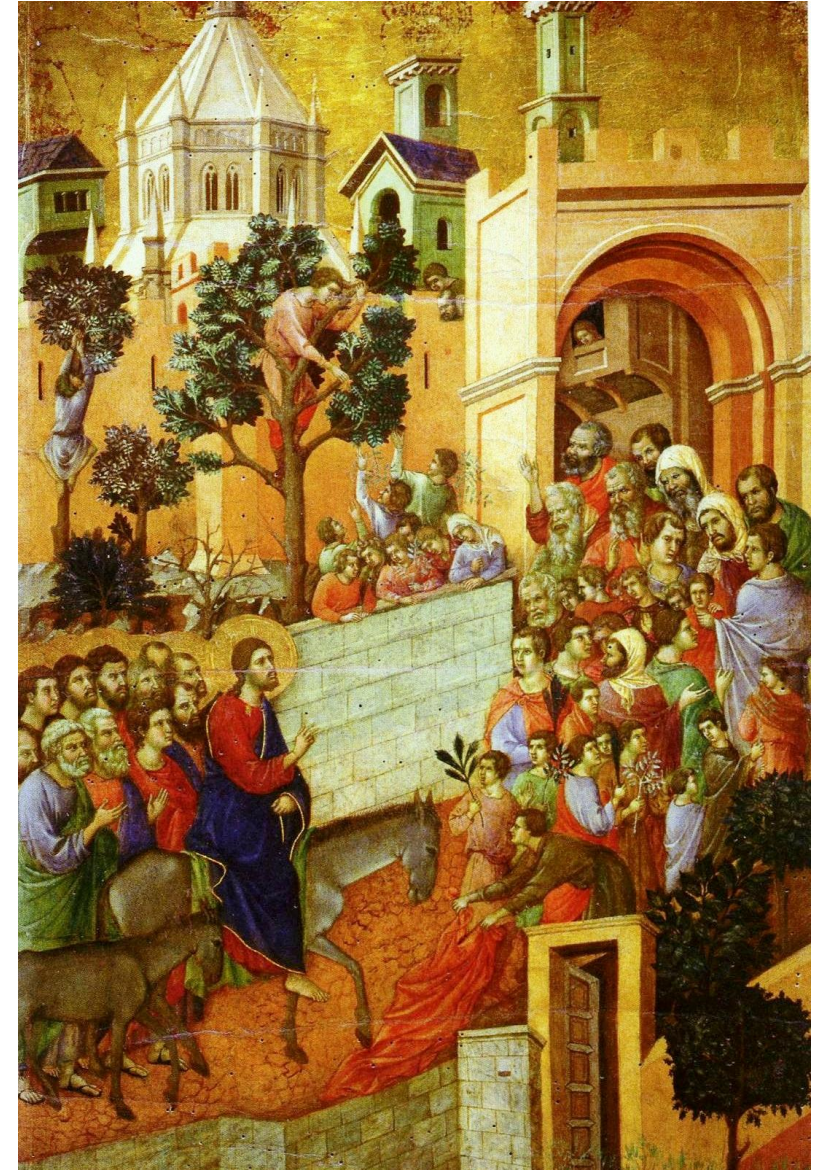
# PALM SUNDAY: A DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENT

- Religious leaders of the Jewish community might think Jesus was a threat to Rome's tolerance for Jewish religious institutions.
- The Jewish population were longing to be set free from the Roman rule by a military leader: a warrior king who would overthrow Rome. But Jesus' vision went against the grain of these ideas.



# PALM SUNDAY: A DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENT

- Jesus **didn't** just unthinkingly accept and passively accommodate to the political and religious institutions and status quo.
- Jesus **didn't** choose to lead a coup against Rome in line with the hopes of ordinary Jewish people at that time.



# PALM SUNDAY: A DANGEROUS ENVIRONMENT

- Instead, Jesus chose to **dissent, disrupt and challenge** **established** religious traditions, the **expectations** of ordinary people and even the **Roman empire** by planning and doing what he did.
- **Why** do you think he did this? (Ask students to think-pair-share with the person next to them, write down their reflections and share with the class: 100-150 words).





**Two passages or verses** from the Hebrew Bible (Christians refer to this as the Old Testament) are important for understanding what Jesus was doing and how people responded to him in the Palm Sunday story.

Specifically, **Zechariah 9:9-10** and **Psalms 118:25-26**.

## LESSON TWO: HEBREW BIBLE & PALM SUNDAY

# HEBREW BIBLE: TWO STUDENTS TO READ THE VERSES

9 Exult greatly, O daughter Zion!  
Shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem!  
Behold: your king is coming to you, a  
just savior is he, Humble, and riding on  
a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a  
donkey.

10 He shall banish the chariot from  
Ephraim, and the horse from  
Jerusalem; The warrior's bow will be  
banished, and he will proclaim peace  
to the nations. His dominion will be  
from sea to sea, and from the River to  
the ends of the earth.

**Zechariah 9:9-10**

25 Lord, grant salvation! [translated from  
Hebrew into Aramaic as 'Hosanna' in Matt  
9] Lord, grant good fortune!

26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of  
the Lord. We bless you from the house of  
the Lord.

**Psalms 118:25-26**

# HEBREW BIBLE

- On your own, read through the verses silently
- **Reflect silently** on what the verses might mean
- Is there a word or idea or image that is especially meaningful for you?
- Is there anything you find difficult to understand or relate to?
- Is there anything you want to find out more about?
- **Write down** about 100-150 words that summarise your reflections.

# ZECHARIAH 9:9-10 — WHAT KIND OF KING?

- Attributes of the 'salvific' or saving figure envisaged by Zechariah include that the one who will come will ...

Suggested activity (5 mins):

- Include a link to a Padlet or shared Google doc and ask students to write down different attributes

# ZECHARIAH 9:9-10 — WHAT KIND OF KING?

- Attributes of the ‘salvific’ or saving figure envisaged by Zechariah include that the one who will come will ...
  - be a royal figure, a king
  - be just
  - be a humble leader (rather than riding on a horse as distinguished persons at that time would do, the mount of this king would be a donkey which people of low rank rode)
  - bring about an end to war (again, the donkey is a direct denial of a horse which was a military animal)
  - bring about peace by non-military means through some sort of divine intervention
  - rule over all the nations of the world

# WHO WAS ZECHARIAH'S INTENDED AUDIENCE?

- Zechariah lived in 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE during the reign of Darius the Great, the Persian King who defeated Alexander the Great.
- Zechariah addressed people who had returned to Jerusalem from their around 70-year exile in Babylon as well as those who had remained in Jerusalem after the city was conquered in 587/586 BCE.

# WHO WAS ZECHARIAH'S INTENDED AUDIENCE?

- A concern of Zechariah was to motivate people to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem which had been destroyed by the Babylonian army in 586 BCE.
- In this context, Zechariah put forward his proclamation or expectation that there would be a great king who would enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey as part of God's deliverance (e.g. saving) of the Jewish people.

# PSALM 118 — HOW WAS IT USED?

- Many scholars maintain that in ancient Jewish life Psalm 118 was used in liturgy.
- Some believe it accompanied a procession of the king and the people entering the temple “with leafy branches up to ... the altar” (verse 27).
- Ezra 3:10-11 suggests it may have been sung at the founding of the second temple after the Jewish people returned from exile and attributed it to “David king of Israel”.

# PSALM 118 — HOW WAS IT USED?

- The psalm may have been sung responsively whereby a leader ('cantor') alternates with a choir or congregation.
- In Jesus' time, Psalm 118 was the last of the 6 psalms (113-118) sung in connection with Passover reflecting on and giving thanks for God's saving the Israelites, particularly from their bondage or slavery in Egypt.

# PSALM 118:1-29

Verses 1–4 An invocation in the form of a litany giving thanks to God

5–9 the king or the psalmist (very likely speaking in the name of the community) describes how the people confidently asked for God's help in times of trouble

10–14 when hostile peoples threatened its life.

15–18 God's rescue is vividly described.

19–25 Then follows a possible dialogue at the Temple gates between the priests and the king/psalmist as the latter enters to offer the thanksgiving sacrifice.

26–27 Finally, the priests impart their blessing

28–29 and the King/psalmist sings in gratitude to God.

# PSALM 118:25

- The verses leading up to 25-26, talk about a time when the people were delivered from trouble by God.
- In the responsive singing, **verse 25** may have been sung by the king/psalmist or congregation at the gates to the temple:

“Lord! Grant salvation!/Rescue us!\* Lord, grant good fortune!”

\*The words “Hosanna” translates the Aramaic word הוֹשִׁינָה (hoshia'na), Aramaic being the language of the Jewish people in Jesus’s time. It is very similar to Hebrew, the language they spoke in previous times and in which most of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is written.

# PSALM 118:26

**Verse 26** may have been sung as a blessing by the priests in response as the procession entered the temple and walked to the altar waving “leafy branches” (verse 27):

“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We bless you from the house of the Lord.”

# HEBREW BIBLE IN PALM SUNDAY STORY: BRAINSTORM

- In pairs, take a piece of paper and draw a vertical line down the middle
- Brainstorm any **similarities, connections or differences** you see between the Hebrew Bible verses and the Palm Sunday story.
- Reflect on: Where do the verses from Zechariah 9 and Psalm 118 'fit' in the story (and vice versa)?
  - Write down dot-points in the 2 columns
- Write down **a question** that has been raised for you (one each; it can be about the Hebrew Bible verses or the Palm Sunday story or both!)

# PALM SUNDAY: RETURNING TO THE 2 QUESTIONS

Now that we've inquired into the background of Palm Sunday and the use of the Hebrew Bible in the Palm Sunday story, let's return to the two questions posed earlier:

- Why did Jesus choose to do what he did on Palm Sunday?
- Why did the crowds of people greet Jesus in the way they did?

# PALM SUNDAY: WHAT WAS JESUS DOING & WHY?

- Jesus carefully planned the events on Palm Sunday (see Mt 21:1-3).
- He wanted to show the people that he was a salvific figure sent by God, the King of Israel.
- However, he wasn't the kind of warrior king that the people were expecting.
- What he was doing was out of the ordinary and designed to draw attention to himself and to the claim he was making in the tradition of 'prophetic signs' in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Isaiah to name only a few).

# PALM SUNDAY: WHAT WAS JESUS DOING & WHY?

- Jesus chose to show people that he was the kind of king that Zechariah 9:9-10 was expecting through the 'sign' of riding into Jerusalem on a donkey.
- Jesus' use of Zechariah was revolutionary and subversive of the political and religious status quo as well as the expectations of his countrymen.
- Jesus would have known that he was setting into motion events that would most likely put him at odds with Roman authority, religious leaders and with the common people, leading to him being arrested and put to death.

# PALM SUNDAY: HOW DID PEOPLE RESPOND & WHY?

- People recognized the reference that Jesus was making to Zechariah and understood the claim he was making, to be their king.
- In response, the people gave Jesus **a royal accolade** that drew on Psalm 118:
  - They shouted out two verses from a psalm attributed to King David about God saving his people, which was associated with a ritual procession of the king entering the temple
  - They waved tree branches and spread their cloaks at the feet of the donkey Jesus rode on.

# PALM SUNDAY: HOW DID PEOPLE RESPOND & WHY?

- Like Jesus, the people drew on the Hebrew Bible in their response to him on Palm Sunday
- It might have been a spontaneous pious response by someone in the crowd that was taken up by others (like a 'chant')
- Or the followers of Jesus might have prearranged it with Jesus.
- Regardless, both the people and Jesus' own followers misunderstood the kind of king that Jesus was claiming to be.

# PALM SUNDAY: JESUS' **AUTHENTIC** RESPONSE TO HIS **DANGEROUS, VOLATILE** ENVIRONMENT

- Jesus acted the way he did because he had in mind **a different type of king or leader** and **a different kind of liberation from oppression** from the prevailing everyday understandings in the culture at the time.
- In doing so, Jesus draw from a tradition in the Hebrew Bible and made these ideas and aspirations **his own**.

# PALM SUNDAY: JESUS' AUTHENTIC RESPONSE TO HIS DANGEROUS, VOLATILE ENVIRONMENT

- On Palm Sunday Jesus committed to, courageously embodied and lived out to the bitter end his ideal of kingship and salvation.
- He thereby found a way through what had up until then been an impenetrable impasse for all humanity and creation.



Secondary school students featured prominently in the Palm Sunday program in 2025, and we will be building on this in 2026 with a segment led by young people.

# PALM SUNDAY CALL TO FAITH COMMUNITIES

- The great civil rights campaigner Cornell West said: “**Justice is what love looks like in public**”.
- Palm Sunday is a time for faith communities, congregations and schools to **stand up in public** and demonstrate compassion for others and passion for justice.
- Now, more than ever, we need to **speak up** for justice and compassion to counter divisive and hurtful sentiments in public discourse, and the **violence, fear and division** we see in our communities.



# PALM SUNDAY CALL: STRONGER TOGETHER



- Palm Sunday in Australia is a ‘**sign**’ that bears witness to the priority of compassion and to the call for justice in our nation.
- It also points to the contribution that migrants and refugees have made to Australian society in a wide range of endeavours. It is a time to stand and walk together.



# PALM SUNDAY CALL: STRONGER TOGETHER



- The call to show **loving kindness and care** for our neighbours, to welcome the stranger, and to uphold the worth and dignity of each person, is central to our Christian faith and practices.
- At the same time, **advocacy** may be needed as part of our response to the lived experience of the vulnerable and marginalised.



# PALM SUNDAY CALL: STRONGER TOGETHER



The 2026 theme – ‘Stronger Together’ – highlights the way our communities can strengthen Australia’s social fabric by:

- extending a safe and welcoming space where everyone can find a sense of belonging, and where our cultural and religious diversity is embraced and celebrated.
- promoting justice and fair treatment so that our life together can flourish.
- enabling all people to contribute to a vibrant, shared future for our nation.

**Come and join the Palm Sunday event to demonstrate your own commitment to justice, peace-making, respect and kindness.**

# WHAT JUSTICE FOR REFUGEES MEANS



- > **Ensuring fair and fast assessment** of claims for refugee status, so people are not left on short-term visas for years, requiring ongoing visa applications.
- > **Providing dignity, not dependence** — people need work and study rights, and access to Medicare while they wait for refugee claims to be assessed (a process that can take years).
- > **Reuniting families** by ensuring Family Reunion processes are timely — many people have been separated from their loved ones for years.
- > **Bringing to safety** the 30 or so asylum seekers still stranded in PNG after 13 years of detention and exile. Some need urgent medical attention; others face destitution and harm in PNG.
- > **Ending offshore processing** and stop exiling people to Nauru.
- > **Resettling refugees** stranded in Indonesia since 2014 due to Australia's policies.
- > **Raising the refugee quota.** The current 20,000-place cap is welcome (it was increased from 17,875 in 2023) but far below both past commitments and global needs.

# PALM SUNDAY CALL FOR FAITH COMMUNITIES TO SEEK JUSTICE FOR REFUGEES



- Unjust systems that perpetuate inequity and disadvantage need to be challenged.
- Christians may contribute to respectful public dialogue with policy makers so that constructive change can happen.
- Watch this short video clip by [Revd. Dr Katherine Ranger](#), a theologian, senior chaplain at an Anglican school in Canberra, and a member of Common Grace: <https://youtu.be/S4lyyqjwnOw>



# PALM SUNDAY — STRONGER TOGETHER — SUN 29 MARCH 2025



- Across Australia on **Palm Sunday** concerned citizens, Christians and people of other faiths, unions and community justice groups will come together to call on the Government to change policies and to be more **humane, just and welcoming** of migrants, refugees and people who are seeking asylum.
- See information about Palm Sunday events and actions you can take on the Refugee Advocacy Network (RAN) website:  
<https://refugeeadvocacynetwork.org.au/> (from 23 February)



**STRONGER  
TOGETHER**

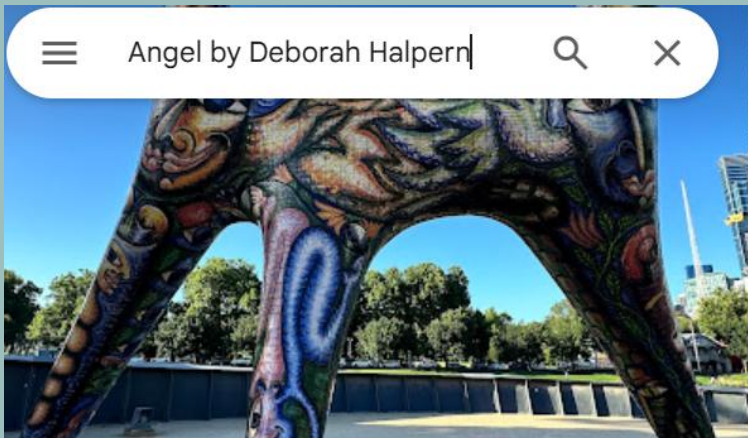
**Walk for justice,  
respect  
and kindness**  
**Sunday 29 March 2026**

1:00 pm: Gather on Princes Bridge with banners  
and placards

1:30 pm: Walk to Birrarung Marr Lower Terrace  
(Angel statue)

2:00 pm – 3:30 pm: Speakers and music at  
Birrarung Marr

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/FVQi6ZXPLCXRipZA>  
<https://www.facebook.com/palmsundaywalk>



## Angel by Deborah Halpern

4.0 ★★★★★ (32)

Sculpture · ♿

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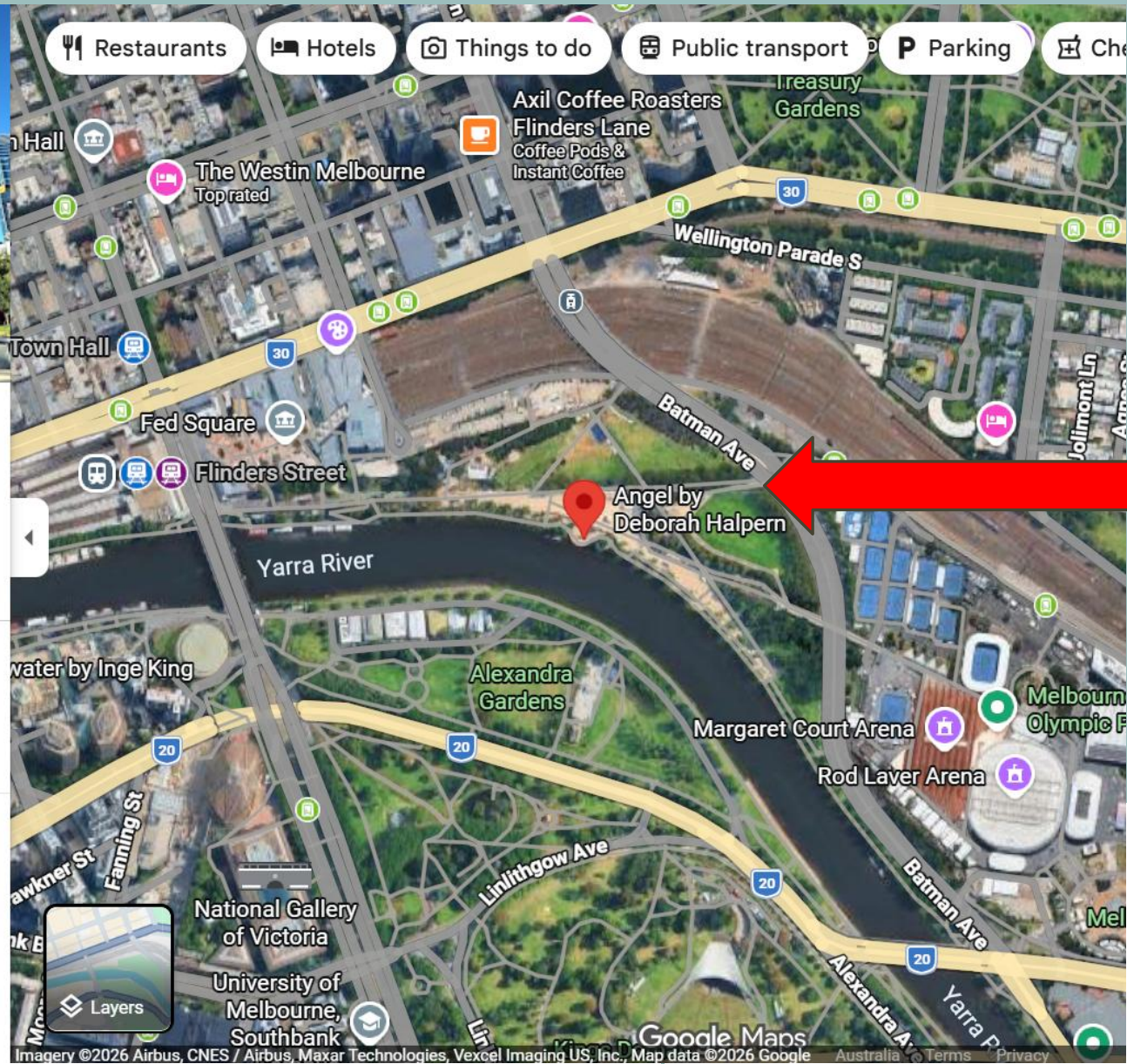
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