

### **Matthew 21:1-11**

**As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, “Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”**

**This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “Say to Daughter Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” The disciples went and did as Jesus had instructed them. They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their cloaks on them for Jesus to sit on.**

**A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”**

**When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?” The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”**

Dear saints of the true God,

You are walking through the shopping mall and you see a large group of people gathered around someone trying to get his autograph. You try to work your way in to get a closer look and keep asking everyone, “Who is this?” The guy on the radio talk show you’ve tuned into has been making some pretty good points, but you’ve never listened to him before. The more impressed you are with him, the more you want to know the answer to the question, “Who is this?” The same goes for the unfamiliar, yet catchy tune to which you find yourself singing; you turn to someone else in the car and ask, “Who is this?” You walk in the room to notice the game on, but you can’t make out either of the teams, so you ask, “Who is this?”

A huge crowd of people had been gathering, leaving a trail of palm branches and clothing in its wake as it slowly moved along. Shouts of the familiar refrain from Psalm 118 were accompanied by repeated “hosannas.” Everyone was caught up in the excitement, either heading toward the crowd or asking around to find out what was going on. It appeared that someone had just come into the city processing on a donkey, but it was hard to make out who it was with all the crowds swarming him. **“When Jesus entered Jerusalem,”** Matthew tells us, **“the whole city was stirred and asked, ‘Who is this?’”** (v.10).

The sports star, the radio talk show host, the musical artist, or the teams playing each other on the television show – we ask “Who is this,” but the answer to the question in each of those cases is really quite trivial. Lives will not be lost, saved, or even all that much affected on the basis of the answer to the question in those cases. But the answer to that same question in relation to Jesus makes all the difference in the world. Finally, the answer to that question for each individual in Jerusalem on that day and during that week would make an eternal difference. And the answer to that same question as it pertains to Jesus makes all the eternal difference for every single individual the world over on this Palm Sunday some 2000 years later. So as we celebrate Jesus’ grand entry into Jerusalem once again this morning, we seek the answer to the exact same question that was asked then, “Who is this?”

### **THEME: Who Is This?**

- 1. We know this is Jesus**
- 2. We believe that this is our Savior from sin**

The answer was really quite simple, when you get right down to it. Some in the crowds knew exactly who it was: **“This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee”** (v.11). Word had gotten around. Jesus’ reputation had preceded him. Many knew him to be the son of the carpenter from Nazareth in Galilee. The events of Jesus’ life and ministry recorded in the Gospels frequently refer to “Jesus of Nazareth.” Sadly, identifying Jesus as the one from Nazareth was sufficient for many. They didn’t care to look beyond the location of his hometown and see that he was really much more than just a well-known individual that hailed from Nazareth.

Who is this? Men like Herod and Pilate perhaps had a little more appreciation for who Jesus was. He was an intriguing individual for sure. He definitely wasn’t your average citizen. Herod longed to be dazzled by some of Jesus’ miraculous feats, hoping to catch a glimpse of what all the buzz was about. And throughout Jesus’ interaction with Pilate, it appeared that Pilate was always uneasy, as if Jesus was someone who deserved much better treatment than what his fellow Jews were showing him. Pilate never seemed to sense any justifiable reason for all the anger and hatred that Jesus’ countrymen showed him.

And speaking of his countrymen, by the end of holy week many of them were not nearly as captivated with Jesus as were Pilate and Herod – at least they weren’t captivated for the same reason. For their response to the question “Who is this” was quite simple: in their eyes Jesus was a menace. So they tried to turn everyone against him. It didn’t matter that none of them could get their stories straight and ever come up with a single accusation that actually held any water. Their minds had been made up for them, in many cases by the religious leaders and high priest himself who had been pushing for Jesus’ death since day one. They didn’t care what he had done or what he was to do, they simply saw him as a stumbling block to their religious and political ambitions, a menace to society.

We have to acknowledge that they were all right, to an extent. Yes, the one riding into Jerusalem amidst all the fanfare was from Nazareth; yes, he was an intriguing individual, and yes, he was a menace, at least from the standpoint of the sinful and wandering religious minds of the day. He was all of those things then, and people today see him as all of those things now. They don’t deny that he existed; sure, there was a religious leader from Nazareth, a historical figure that did in fact live at that time in that place. Yes, he is an intriguing individual, so intriguing today even that people will go to the greatest of lengths either to discredit him or defend him, and he still has millions of followers throughout the world. And many would label him a menace, pointing to all the damage done historically in the name of Christianity.

## 2. We believe that this is our Savior from sin

But, as we celebrate the Savior’s arrival in the city of Jerusalem, what matters more than the answers others would give to the question, “Who is this?” is the answer you give to that very question. Finally no one else’s answer is going to benefit you any. It is the response of your heart that matters to God. So, who is this Jesus anyways? Surely it’s a silly question for churchgoers like us, isn’t it? Of course we know who Jesus is ...

...at least with our heads. If the question “Who is this?” were posed as a multiple choice question on a test or a quiz, I think we’d all nail it. When it comes to answering such questions in Bible class, Sunday school, or Confirmation, we feel pretty confident. We know a great deal of facts and details about Jesus from Scripture, and when it comes to responding with the standard answers, we’ve got most of them memorized. Our heads are filled with knowledge about the one born in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph.

But it’s said that the greatest distance on earth is that between the head and the heart. As Christians then, is it possible that we may be overly content with our head knowledge about Jesus at the expense of our heart? In other words, I may be able to give the perfectly correct answer to the question “Who is this?” in regard to Jesus, but how well can I personally respond when asked, “Who is Jesus to me?” Ah, now we’re going to a place that may not be all that comfortable. We’re talking about the heart; we’re talking about the affective, and not just the cognitive. We’re talking about feelings and emotions, not just facts and figures, doctrines and dates. Is head knowledge about Jesus important – absolutely! **“From infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in**

**Christ Jesus”** (2 Timothy 3:15). Yes, knowing is essential, but there’s a disconnect if that knowledge of Jesus doesn’t also affect our spiritual inner being. That knowledge leads to salvation, but salvation is more than just a handy little piece of information to have stored up in my head – salvation is tied directly to our hearts. I know who Jesus is with my head, but has that knowledge translated into a spiritual investment in my relationship with Jesus?

Yes, it is necessary to know salvation in your head, but it’s more important to “know” it in your heart by faith! The crowds that surrounded Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem knew him with their heads, as did the religious leaders of his day and countless unbelievers today; but their hearts remain dead to him. We cannot equate knowing someone with having a relationship with that person. I know who Harrison Ford is. I know that he starred in the Star Wars movies as Hans Solo and also starred in the Indiana Jones movies and many other great movies, but I don’t have a relationship with him. Knowledge is a lot different than a personal relationship with someone.

In the same way, woe to the person who knows who Jesus is and that is all the farther it goes. By this, I mean the person who can spout all kind of facts about Jesus and knows the history of Jesus, but has no relationship with him. For surely that individual will be in for a shocking surprise when asked by God the Father about his Son, and he is ill-prepared to answer from his own heart. May this never be the case for us.

I think that it easy for us to fall into this trap. Many of us sitting here have been through Catechism instruction and have been confirmed. In many ways this is lots of head knowledge about Jesus. How many people have this false notion that Confirmation knowledge equals heart knowledge? Why do so many people fall away from God shortly after making their Confirmation promises? Why do people think that coming to church once a month or even less frequently is acceptable to God? It is because the devil has led us to forget how important Jesus is to our hearts. The devil wants us to forget how important and wonderful the true Jesus, the Savior of the world is to my heart that is lost in sin and destruction.

But to those whose hearts have been led to see Jesus for who he truly is, let us rejoice and be glad not only that we know who Jesus is, but also that in his grace he has worked in our hearts the conviction to fully believe in him. For you know in your head that Scripture calls him Savior, but in your heart you trust that he’s your personal Savior. You know in your head the chronology of events that would transpire after his entry into Jerusalem, but you are convinced in your heart that he made that journey for you to reconcile you to his Father. You know in your head that Jesus was crucified, but your heart rejoices that he bled and died taking your place. You know in your head that the Bible says he died to forgive the sins of the world, but your heart beats with spiritual life because you know with your heart that as a part of the world, it is your sins that are forgiven.

“Who is this” who rode into Jerusalem amid pomp and fanfare and shouts of celebration? Many know the simple answer to that question – it was Jesus. But you know the more profound answer to that question because the eyes of your heart have been opened up to see him as your Jesus and your Savior, the one who resolutely made the trek to Golgotha because he had you not only on his mind, but on his heart as well. This Holy Week, as we again visit the upper room, behold the cross, and ultimately end up at a temporary tomb, let what your Jesus did permeate your heart and fill you with his love, a love that can’t be comprehended here (in the head), but only in here (the heart). Amen.