

Palm Sunday April 5, 2020
Philippians 2:6-7

“Who although He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped...He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death...Therefore God exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above all names.”

A Blessed Palm Sunday! On Palm Sunday long ago Jesus made His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, hailed by the crowd of Pilgrims as the “Son of David,” received as the “King of Israel.” Truly He was the “King of Israel,” “the shoot of the stump of Jesse,” promised centuries earlier through Isaiah, who would restore the royal line of David, cut off by the Babylonians. He was the “Son of David,” who would receive the everlasting kingdom, God promised centuries earlier through the prophet Nathan.

He was welcomed as the King, but the welcome He received, while pious and an expression of faithful and loving hearts, was underwhelming in comparison to the welcome earthly kings received when entering a city. A Pharaoh, a Caesar or an Emperor, would have entered the city in a golden chariot, pulled by a team of white horses. The arrival of an earthly monarch would have been announced by heralds and proclaimed by trumpeters, so the crowds would be worked into a frenzy by the time he passed. Civic leaders and local dignitaries would have been present to welcome him into the city, long boring speeches would have been made and he would have been honoured with a gift!

Jesus received a welcome fit a king, but not an earthly king, such as a president, prime-minister or queen. He received a welcome fit for a king who had surrendered all, humbled Himself and taken the form of a servant. There was no golden crib for Him to rest in at birth, and so there was no golden chariot to bear Him into the city. His birth was heralded by angels, but they spoke their message not to the rich and powerful, but to shepherds keeping watch at night over their flocks. Wise men sought and found Him, but His own king tried to kill him. The cruel anger of King Herod, foreshadowed the deadly anger of the leaders of Jerusalem, who watched with disdain as the crowd of pilgrims welcomed Him into their city as king. Their anger, expressed in His arrest, would be fulfilled in His crucifixion, under orders of the representative of the Roman King. Jesus is a king unlike all other kings. He is the King of kings who made himself lowly, even to the point of death on the cross, so we would be raised up in forgiveness and stand in the presence of God; now through faith, but one day fully in His resurrection to life everlasting. He is the king who came not to be served, but to serve. He is the King who gave His life as a ransom for many. He is the King who rose from the grave, so that whoever calls on His name would have forgiveness in time and life in eternity!

Jesus is a different king by the nature of His being. Human royalty is passed along family lines, from generation to generation. Human royalty began with the rule of a strong man or woman, who rose to leadership and maintained his or her position, by the consolidation of power. There were no elections! In the old days, legitimacy to rule stemmed from the power to command and the ability to maintain control of the people. In ancient times, rulers were worshipped and honoured as deities; lesser than the great gods of the pantheon, but gods none the less. This led to the belief that royal families were different than the families of common people. Royal families are no different than other families in terms of human nature. Nevertheless, royal families claimed to be special and appealed to divine right to legitimize their rule. On the other hand, Jesus is both different in the nature of His being and King by divine right. Paul called Him, “The image of the invisible God.” In Colossians he said, “All things were

created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.” He is God from eternity, the Creator and ruler of heaven and earth.

Jesus is a different king according to the nature of being and also in the manner of His rule. It is an observation of history that power corrupts those who hold it. Ancient Israel was first ruled by God through judges and prophets. Israel wanted a king, so they could be like the other nations. God warned that their kings would abuse them, by misusing their power. That’s what happened, because that’s human nature and the way of the world. People use power for their personal benefit and advantage! When Jesus saw His disciples jockeying for position, in what they presumed would be His kingdom, He warned them not to exalt themselves at the expense of the others. Jesus said, “The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest and the leader as the one who serves.” Unlike earthly kings, Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. He is the King who set aside His royal splendour to live in the form of a servant, so He might serve us by offering His life on the cross for our salvation.

Jesus entered Jerusalem in a humble manner in terms of earthly kings; and especially in terms of His divine kingship from eternity. But again this emphasized His humility, in that although He is God from eternity, He did not express the power of His majesty, during His earthly sojourn. Paul writes, “Although He was in the form of God, He did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant.” In Greek and Roman mythology, the gods would sometimes take on human form in appearance, though not in reality. They made themselves appear human, usually for their own sport and entertainment. When the fun was over, they dropped the facade of humanity and headed back to the pleasures of Olympus. But Jesus became human in reality and for the long haul. It says in the letter to the Hebrews, “Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity, so that by His death He might destroy him who holds the power of death that is the devil.” Jesus became truly human, even to the point of death. He died, so that we would live in Him!

Jesus started out as a fetus as we all do. He was born an infant and passed through childhood before He became an adult. This too was a great act of humility, because children are under the authority of others, especially their parents. I hope you love your parents. I hope you remember your parents with love if they are gone. But, when you were a child, did you like everything your parents made you do? Did you agree with all their decisions? Did you ever talk back? When He was a child, Jesus’ parents left Him behind in the temple. When they came back and found Him, they made it sound like it was His fault. His mother said, “Son why have you treated us like this?” He had done nothing wrong, but He didn’t talk back. Amazing for a 12 year old. He really was the Son of God! Although God from eternity, He submitted to His parents; even as He submitted to His heavenly Father and was obedient to the point of death on a cross. Jesus humbled Himself in obedience to His heavenly Father, out of love for us, so that we would become His sisters and brothers, children of the heavenly Father, through the forgiveness of His cross. He humbled Himself and bore our sin. He lowered Himself to the point of death, so He might raise us up in forgiveness and give us life.

Paul says because Jesus was obedient even unto death on the cross, “God has highly exalted Him.” Jesus’ exaltation was the direct result of His victory over sin, the devil and death, which He accomplished through the humility of His life and the sacrifice of His cross. Earthly kings do not achieve victory through their own death. They win the victory, by making their enemies die! Kings are acclaimed for their triumphs, not for their defeats. Rulers do not lead the charge into

battle. They stand far behind lines and give the order for others to charge. When King David was growing old, the commanders of Israel would not allow him to lead them into battle, “lest the lamp of Israel be extinguished.” Jesus led the charge and won the victory over sin, the devil and death by His own death on the cross! God accepted His sacrifice, acknowledged His victory and exalted Him in His resurrection. Unlike any other king, Jesus had the power to lay down His life and power to take it up again!

Paul continues saying that God “bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” God showed He accepted Jesus’ sacrifice for the atonement of the sin of the world and honoured Him, by raising Him from the dead. In Revelation, He is honoured as the only one in heaven or on earth, who is found worthy to open the scroll of salvation. In the letter to the Hebrews, He is honoured as the eternal source of salvation for all who obey Him. He is honoured by God as the Saviour of all people and acknowledged as the only way through which we come to the Father in peace. Jesus was a common name in first century Palestine. It was a variation of the name “Joshua,” which means “The Lord Saves!” There were many men named Jesus, but this Jesus did what no other man could do. He offered Himself as a ransom for the sin of the world. Jesus lay down His life for our sin and took it up again for our salvation! Therefore God exalted this Jesus and gave His name as the name of salvation, saying that whoever calls on His name will be saved!

Jesus was honoured by the crowd of pilgrims who welcomed Him into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. We remember their faith and emulate their faithfulness. Jesus became our Saviour through His life of perfect obedience and His sacrificial death on the cross. God honoured Jesus by making His name, the name of salvation; the only name given under heaven, by which we are saved! The greatest honour we can give Jesus is to call Him our Saviour.

We honour Jesus by coming to Him with our sins for forgiveness. He will never turn us away! We honour Jesus by confessing Him as our Lord. He will always be faithful to us! We honour Jesus by calling upon His name for help during troubled times. He will answer us with salvation and sustain us through all things with His presence. He is our King, our Saviour and our God. God draws all who call on the name of Jesus close to His heart through faith in time. God will bring all who call on the name of Jesus into His presence fully in eternity. As the old hymn sings, “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds to a believer’s ear!”

As we begin Holy Week, God bless us with hearts that welcome Jesus as Saviour. God bless us with ears that listen to His voice. God bless us with lips that confess Him as Lord, to the glory of the Father. Amen

The peace of God that passes all understanding keep our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Amen