

# Among Palms and Betrayals

## Matthew 21:1–11

### Palm Crosses

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### From Palms to Passion

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### Today's Bible Reading

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### Jesus the King (video)

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### Additional Bible Readings

**Isaiah 50:4–9a**

**Psalms 31:9–16**

**Philippians 2:5–11**

**O God, in our times of loneliness, doubt, and turmoil, may we be reminded to entrust ourselves to your unfailing love. Grant us discernment about when to protect ourselves and when to make ourselves vulnerable. Empower us as communities of faith to witness in word and deed to your steadfast, never-failing, liberating, and transforming love.**

Matthew's gospel demonstrates how Jesus' life fulfills the Hebrew scriptures. In Matthew 21:5, we hear echoes of Isaiah 62:11 and Zechariah 9:9.

**Matthew 21:1–11** starts in the relative quiet of a hillside and ends in the middle of the city of Jerusalem, with shouting and a melee of palms and pilgrims. The reading is full of anticipation, drama, and contrasts. The disciples and the crowd lay down their cloaks for Jesus in a powerful gesture of adoration and self-sacrifice. This adoration falters when the disciples fall asleep when Jesus asks them to keep watch and pray (26:36). When soldiers arrest Jesus, they flee into the night (26:56). These disciples are not at the cross, as the women disciples keep vigil .

In **Matthew 26:14—27:66**, the disciples cloak themselves in self-protection and denial. The adulation of Jesus stems from the crowd's hysteria. That same hysteria will prompt them to shout "Crucify." Some have judged Matthew and the other gospel writers to be anti-Semitic because of the language they use in the Passion narratives. In Matthew's account, the problem is not the religious beliefs of the leaders involved – the problem is leaders driven by fear and rush to judgment. The difficulties arise because of the choices made by certain leaders like Pilate, who chooses to "go along to get along." Matthew's Jewish readers would have recognized a powerful symbolism in Pilate's seemingly simple act of washing his hands. According to Deuteronomy 21:1–9, this could have been a way of declaring Jesus' innocence, but Pilate – through his cowardice – reduces it to something meaningless.

When death comes, Earth reflects the significance of what happened: the temple curtain split in two, Earth shakes, and rocks split. The foundations have been fractured. Earth protests. It is an event of global significance. It would appear the forces of destruction have had the last say.

The question of Jesus' identity reverberates through Matthew's account. "Tell us if you are the Messiah." The writer uses several titles for Jesus in these chapters, including "Son of Man," "Son of God," and even "King." What does it mean for us now to use these titles to claim our faith in the one who saves?