

# ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

*(BY Sisters Bonnie Komarnicki and Patricia Lacey, SSMI,  
of the Ukrainian Catholic Religious Education Centre, Saskatoon, Canada)*

## DID YOU KNOW?

This Sunday, Palm Sunday, may be called "Flower or Blossom Sunday," Our people may call this Sunday "Pussy-willow". As there are no palms or olive trees growing in this country, we have a custom of using willow branches, a tree that is the first to blossom in the spring.

In the prayer for blessings of palms, the willow branch is referred to as the symbol of the resurrection. As people were leaving the church they would lightly strike one another on the shoulder with the willow branch, saying "It is not I who strike you, but it is the willow branch, within a week we shall celebrate Easter." This became a reminder that Easter was drawing near.

Lazarus Saturday and the Entry into Jerusalem are the opening to Holy Week. The same troparion unites both feasts. The mystical link to the resurrection of Christ himself, it is like prophecy in action.

## HISTORY OF THE CELEBRATION

- Began in Jerusalem and within a short period became the oldest feast day in the Eastern Church.
- Reaches back to the third century.
- Back in the fourth century, on her pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Silvia of Aquitaine describes how the faithful relived the event. After the early morning services, the faithful people returned to the Church around one in the afternoon. As they gathered they chanted various hymns, psalms and the Gospel reading of the event took place. Bearing palms and olive branches in their hands the faithful proceeded through the city to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre chanting hymns, psalms, always with the refrain: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord". Like Christ, the bishop rode on a donkey at the end of the procession. This solemn procession would conclude with a Vespers service.
- Ancient documents testify to the commemoration of the event. St. Epiphanius of Cyprus (+403) composed two sermons. St. Ephrem the Syrian (+373) dedicated a special hymn to the feast. Anastasius the Sinaite (7c), a monk and a theologian of the Eastern Church was the first to note that the Forty Days Fast terminated with the feast of the Entry into Jerusalem.
- Andrew of Crete, John of Damascus and Theodore and Joseph the Studite, wrote the sticheras and canons for this feast back in the seventh century.
- Sometime between the sixth and seventh centuries this feast spread to the Western Church under the title of Palm Sunday.

## THE ICON

Our focus is on Christ, seated sideways on the donkey. The icon portrays His voluntary passion and death. It is an image of the installation of the King of Glory in His Kingdom.

The disciples follow Him and the crowd meets Jesus at the Jerusalem gate.

Traditionally, children play a prominent role in the representation of the Entry into Jerusalem. Though the Gospels do not specify the children's presence, the Church sees in them the very embodiment of the Biblical reference: "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings thou hast brought perfect praise." (Psalm 8: 3)

The Mount of Olives reminds us of other "mountain top" experiences of divine revelations at Sinai, Horeb or Tabor. The tree with children gathering palms reminds us about the oak of Mamre and the tree of Life. The city is reminiscent of the house of Abraham.



*(This icon is in color on the accompanying color insert)*

Palms are the symbol of joy and feasting. The Jews used them to greet important people.

Come then; let us run with him as he presses on to his passion. Let us imitate those who have gone out to meet him, not scattering olive branches or palms in his path, but spreading ourselves before him as best we can, with humility of soul and upright purpose. So may we welcome the Word as he comes, so may God who cannot be contained within any bounds, be contained within us.

*(Address of St. Andrew of Crete (c. 660 – 740))*

## WHAT CAN I DO AT HOME?

- Attend Church on Sunday and take home a few branches of the blessed Pussy Willows. Place them in your bedrooms and icon corner.
- Attend Services during Holy Week and Easter.
- Place the icon of the Entry into Jerusalem in the icon corner.
- Explain the symbolism of the icon.