

“Live from Jerusalem”
Sermon on Palm Sunday, March 28, 2021
(News reporter dramatization)

Good morning!

Welcome to Jerusalem, the City of David. I am going to pretend to be a news reporter this morning. So, welcome everybody! You are following us live from Jerusalem. I can tell you right off the bat: this city is in a state of wild anticipation this morning. Sources are telling us that a well-known Galilean, a widely respected leader with rabbinical credentials and a large following up north, will enter the city gates today. There have been Messianic rumors about him. That’s why we are here to report. Roman guards are of course everywhere, watching closely. Make no mistake: they will intervene if the situation gets out of hand, if in fact an uprising needs to be quelled. Their swords have been sharpened. It will be interesting to see how this alleged Messiah stages his entrance. Will he show up armed? Will he ride on a battle horse with his followers? Will he make a big speech? Will he insult Cesar?

Jerusalem, for those of you who may not know, is a high-altitude city, and I don’t mean the high altitude of religion, although that’s true too, especially with the impressive Temple, the center of Judaism. That aside, we are at almost 2,500 feet. This very place, named after Israel’s most famous king, is situated in the hill country of Judea. It has an intricate system of water cisterns designed for its inhabitants to survive long sieges. Of course, there won’t be a siege today. The skies are blue; the Romans are securely in charge and people are giddy. But we believe this situation could easily turn. The Roman occupiers have been provoked by recent small uprisings in this region. And governor Pontius Pilate doesn’t play around, we know that. He was sent here for one mission only: to restore and maintain order, and that mission came from the Emperor himself.

Now, the person we are all waiting for today is called Jesus, a common enough name in Herod’s kingdom. Herod himself is a sort of puppet king, but he known as a ruthless tyrant who doesn’t shy away from killing his own family members. He is believed to be fond of this Jesus; but we also found out that once, a few years ago, he had a bad experience with a close relative of this Galilean. That fellow was foolish enough to question the legitimacy of the king’s marriage; he insulted Herodias in public. Named ‘John the Baptist’ for his practice of religious cleansing rituals, he is no longer with us. His head was served to the queen on a silver platter. That’s a true story, ladies and gentlemen, it’s a true story, it has been vetted by all news organizations. I sure hope this Jesus doesn’t make the same mistake!

Well, what do we know about him? As always, there are wild stories circulating in this community. Earlier, I spoke to an older fellow who is from Capernaum, one of the villages along the Lake of Galilee where Rabbi Jesus is from. He said people there believe this Rabbi can walk on water. And no, he didn't mean that as a metaphor. People say this fellow actually walked on water! The old man also said that he knows neighbors who were healed by him. He said Jesus held a speech once that made him sound like Moses or something. And at another time he apparently prepared food for 5,000 people. To be honest, as a reporter, I don't quite know what to make of it and what to expect. A crazy person? A natural leader? With these Messiah types you never know...

Wait, I hear people screaming now! I think he's coming... And folks, they are throwing their cloaks on the street like they're expecting a king. That could spell trouble! They are even ripping green palm branches off the trees, throwing them out for good measure. They are dancing, people are dancing in the streets. I hear them sing something like "Hosanna!" This is the reception of a king, ladies and gentlemen, and it could definitely spell trouble for this fellow because there is already a king in this town! The Roman soldiers are quietly observing. They probably have orders not to escalate. And now, dear audience, we hear hooves. But to be honest, this must be a small horse, a very small horse. It's hard to see anything. People are still moving in front of us. Now he comes and what I see is astounding. This guy is riding on a donkey, yes, a small little donkey with large ears and next to it – how cute! – there is a little baby donkey. People are feeding the colt. A huge surprise and I thought I had seen everything... But what is this supposed to mean?

I have some experts here with me. They are telling me that the donkey is a sign of peace, while a horse would signify war. They also say that there is an old prophecy in the Book of Zechariah about a future Messiah riding on a donkey. Interesting! And they say, the palm branches are a symbol of liberation going back to the Book of Maccabees, a family of liberators from a few centuries ago. These are all very mixed messages that are being sent here today, ladies and gentlemen. Mixed messages, but for now everything seems to be relatively calm. I wonder how long it will last? You will have to stay tuned with us throughout this week. I don't think the last word has been spoken yet on this matter. I just have a feeling we should pay attention. Perhaps future generations will say that history was made on this donkey's back. Cross your fingers folks, this city has killed some of its most promising leaders. It will be an interesting week. Well, for now I say good bye, with palm branches everywhere and people are going nuts. With Passover coming, this will be a holy week with many pilgrims in a city that is on edge. Stay tuned!