

The Triumphal Entry

*Matthew 21:1-11; Mark
11:1-11; Luke 19:29-38;
John 12:12-19*



*Year A Palm Sunday ; Year
B Palm Sunday ; Year C
Palm Sunday ; Year B
Christ the King
(Episcopal); Year C Christ
the King (Episcopal)*

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Parts by scene

■ = large part ▲ = medium sized part ● = small part

		1	2	3	4
▲	James - the most officious disciple, often the most frustrated with Jesus' unconventional decisions (such as his allowing women to join the group)	▲		●	
▲	Matthew - a former tax collector (i.e. a agent of the Roman occupation of his own people) who in his repentance from that past life is the most religiously fervent of the disciples	▲		●	
▲	Judas - possibly the deepest thinker and best organizer, the one who usually sees the big picture most clearly, and also the disciple with the best sense of humor	■		▲	
▲	John - the gentlest and most caring of the disciples	▲		▲	
▲	Joanna - a wealthy woman with a perceptive and agile intellect who abandons her life as the co-manager of King Herod's household to follow Jesus	▲		▲	
▲	Jesus	▲			▲
▲	Phillip - one of the youngest disciples, always well-meaning and honestly curious, sometimes lacking in confidence		▲		▲
▲	Thomas - the skeptic, who really wants to believe because of his emotional bond with the others, but can't simply ignore his doubts		▲		▲
▲	Man - a farmer who turns out to be a devout believer in Jesus		▲		
●	Wife - the farmer's wife, a perceptive and thoughtful woman		●		
●	Mary Magdalene - a 'fallen woman' who became the first female disciple, the humblest member of the group due to her shame about her past				▲
●	Peter - the most headstrong disciple, and the least afraid of a fight, but never the smartest person in the room				●

Scene 1

James , Jesus , Joanna , John , Judas , Matthew

{Jesus and the disciples are camped a half day's walk from Jerusalem. They will enter the city tomorrow. James enters and walks over to a spot to sit.}

James *[speaking to himself hypnotically in verse as he walks]*
One more day until the Day is come,
And men are made for life - or fall away.
I tremble, son of thunder that I am,
And take another step along the way.

{Matthew enters and walks over to sit next to James.}

Matthew *[speaking to himself hypnotically in verse as he walks]*
One more day 'til Righteousness arising
Sweeps away the dark of night and sin.
May I be judged both able and deserving
To help to bring Messiah's Kingdom in.

{Judas enters and walks over to sit next to the others.}

Judas *[speaking to himself hypnotically in verse as he walks]*
One more day until the new beginning,
After all the plans and preparations,
The final struggle for the final ending:
The nation's bloody death - or Liberation.

{John enters and walks over to sit next to the others.}

John *[speaking to himself hypnotically in verse as he walks]*
One more day until my Lord's desire
Is fulfilled, whatever it might be.
May it be Peace, and not a sword or fire,
That sweeps the city's busy, slumbering streets.

{Joanna enters and walks over to sit next to the others.}

Joanna *[speaking to herself hypnotically in verse as she walks]*
One more day I still seem to be with him.
I never thought I'd last this long at all!
Through every weather, place, or pace, or rhythm,
Still following that enigmatic Call.

{Everybody snaps out of their introspective moods and returns to normal speech in the rest of the scene.}

James So. I've called this meeting to discuss the obvious: we're entering Jerusalem tomorrow, and we need to make plans.

Judas I've already sent out some feelers. There are at least three liberation groups who'll march with us if we ask them.

Joanna *[suddenly worried]* Liberation groups? Which groups?

Judas One is a band of zealots from the desert. Another is the group we met with last month, the Patriots For Judah. *[suddenly reluctant to spell out the exact nature of the third group]* The third is a...group that's been...active opposing the Romans for years now.

Matthew Opposing them how?

Judas They sabotage Roman facilities, steal weapons when they can, and sometimes...silence key figures.

John Assassination? Military actions? What kind of group is this?

Judas One that serves the cause in its own way. And the other two groups are totally peaceful. The Patriots are political, and the zealots are basically monks. I think it's a good mix myself, and with the three of them, we can assemble quite a contingent to march through the gates.

Joanna But they're all outsiders! Wouldn't it better to associate ourselves with more respectable parties? Chuza has drummed up quite a bit of support among the movers and shakers of the city. We could have leading merchants and city administrators marching by our side. There wouldn't be as many of them, but they might make a better impression on the citizenry - and the Romans - than...your people.

Judas *[calmly]* By all means, invite your city leaders to join us.

Joanna *[a little exasperated]* There's no way they'd join a group that espoused violence, and I hate to tell you, but the Patriots for Judah are seen as a political joke in the highest circles of the city.

Judas *[coldly, getting a little irritated in turn]* Maybe the joke will be on your circles.

James Look, what I want to know about all these groups is whether they're going to want a piece of the action. I doubt any of them will be content to let us call the shots. Bit by bit, they're going to steal away control of this movement, and who knows what crazy directions they'll take it in? We could be cut out completely!

Joanna No matter who we join with, you have to expect they're going to want to contribute their own ideas.

Matthew *[dogmatically]* But there *are* no "ideas"! We're not a political group or a military group or a civic group. We are a Person. The rabbi. *He* is the Revolution. We shouldn't accept any group that doesn't acknowledge that. And certainly none of the non-religious ones!

Judas *[sarcastically]* Then it'll be a pretty small bunch marching through the gates tomorrow. Just another band of travelers.

Matthew *[piously]* Gideon only needed 300.

Judas At this point, I'd be thrilled to have 300.

John Please, everybody, we're thinking about this all wrong. Marching into the city with a big following is not the rabbi's way. His power is not in strength of arms or political influence, but in his words. We should enter the city like we've entered every other city so far: invisibly and silently. And we should preach and heal and talk with the people like we always do. And the Word will have its effect.

James *[angrily]* You always think you know what the rabbi wants better than we do, but you know what? This city is not like any other city. This is *Jerusalem*, the heart of the nation. And tomorrow isn't just another day like all the others; it's the Day. The Great Day of the Lord!

{People begin talking really fast and interrupting each other.}

Judas *[urgently]* That's exactly why we need to make a big impression. We *need* these other groups! You think you can -

John *[finally losing his patience]* Then let's ask him! Talk about "think you know what he wants"! Let's go right now and -

Joanna *[in exasperation]* You men and your fighting! Why did I ever sign up for this -

Matthew *[boldly]* Hear the word of the Lord! *[more loudly]* Hear the word of the Lord!

{Jesus enters}

Jesus Peace be with you!

everybody Rabbi!

Jesus *[calmly]* What are you discussing?

{A pause while everybody gets over their embarrassment at being caught fighting.}

John *[meekly]* How we should enter the city.

Jesus Ah! Well, there's nothing to worry about on that score. All the arrangements have been made.

Judas The arrangements?

Jesus Thomas and Phillip are handling them even as we speak.

James Thomas and Phillip?

Jesus Don't worry, it's a simple task.

Matthew Simple?

Jesus They'll be back by nightfall.

{A pause}

John Rabbi? May we ask what arrangements you're making?

Jesus You can ask Thomas and Phillip when they get back. I'm going off to pray now, and then I'm going to bed early. Tomorrow is a big day!

Scene 2

Man , Phillip , Thomas , Wife

{Thomas and Phillip enter a farm near the city.}

Phillip I think this is the place.

Thomas I sure hope so. It doesn't look like there's another house for miles.

Phillip Do you remember the password?

Thomas The what?

Phillip The password.

Thomas I don't remember anything about a password.

Phillip When we take the donkey colt, if we're asked why we're taking it, we say, "The Lord has need of it."

Thomas *[with a laugh]* That's not a password; that's just an explanation.

Phillip You mean it's not like, you know, one secret agent says, "The moon flies high in the winter," and then the other one says, "The crow knows his way in the dark"?

Thomas Hah! No, I don't think this is about security, but courtesy. These people must be supporters who have already volunteered the colt. We're just telling them that now's the time.

Phillip Well, that's good. I was worried what would happen if we gave the password and then they were like, "What are you talking about?"

Thomas We'll make a doubter of you yet! But in this case, even I have no problem believing the plan has been well laid.

Phillip There it is!

Thomas Great, let's get it and go, and maybe there'll be no need for passwords at all.

{They begin to untie the colt when the owner of the farm enters.}

Man *[loudly and angrily]* Hey, you! What do you think you're doing?

{Shocked, Thomas and Phillip look at each other for a moment.}

Phillip *[carefully reciting what he still thinks of as a password]* Uh..."the Lord has need of it."

Man What are you talking about?

Thomas *[totally flustered]* What? Uh. We're...we're from...*[finally falling back on the "password" in his distress]* the Lord has need of it!

Man *[sarastically]* I'll bet he does! Now why don't you just walk away, and no one will get hurt.

{His wife enters.}

Wife *[penetratingly]* What lord? Who is your lord?

Man *[frantically to his wife]* Get back in the house! They were stealing the colt. They could be violent!

Wife I know. I heard. *[to Thomas and Phillip]* What lord?

Phillip Our rabbi. Joshua of Nazareth.

Man My God!

Wife I knew it! I heard he was in the area.

Man Is he here? May we meet him? We're just simple farmers, but -

Thomas I'm sorry. We're camped a few miles from here, and he's going straight into the city first thing tomorrow.

Wife *[in a daze]* Into the city!

Man *[in wonder]* Into Jerusalem!

{A silence while the disciples ponder the couple's sudden awe.}

Thomas Well, we should get going.

Phillip It's all right for us to take the colt, then?

Man Of course! In fact, wouldn't a horse be better? Joshua of Nazareth can have any horse in my stable!

Thomas That's all right. He said specifically to take the donkey colt.

Wife Really? Why that choice? Do you know what he means by it?

Phillip We almost never know what he means!

Thomas *[jokingly]* "Ours is but to do or die."

Man Well, God be with you and your good work.

Thomas Thanks. The rabbi says we'll return the colt soon.

Wife *[thoughtfully]* Really?

Phillip Um. Yes. That's what he said. If it's not us returning it and we don't meet again: God's blessing be upon you.

Man Thank you. But you may yet meet us again.

Scene 3

James , Joanna , John , Judas , Matthew

{The next morning, Jesus and the disciples approach the gates of Jerusalem, Jesus riding on the donkey colt.}

James A donkey? They brought back a donkey? What were they thinking? What kind of king enters his kingdom on a donkey?

Matthew It's what the rabbi told them to get. I don't understand it, either, but...there's something...a scripture about a donkey's colt...

James Who cares about the scriptures! Just look at him! He's looks like a parody of a king. A joke!

Matthew *[still trying to remember the scripture]* Something about the daughters of Zion and...Oh my God!

James What is it? What's wrong?

Matthew What's that huge crowd doing out here?

{An enormous crowd is gathered by the gates. At the sight of Jesus, they begin to cheer and chant. (The crowd can be read together by everybody.)}

crowd Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!

{John and Joanna walk along together on the road}

John *[at a loss]* Did Chuza arrange this?

Joanna *[also overwhelmed by the crowd]* He could never have imagined...*this*. Nor could I. And I'm not sure I even would have wanted it if I had.

John I know what you mean. This all seems...wrong somehow. I've never known the rabbi to seek out adulation. This just doesn't seem like him.

Joanna I thought his plan would be more serious. Even if it involved Judas' rebels.

John Maybe he won't be the Prince of Peace I always imagined. Maybe there really will be a fight!

Joanna Maybe he'll have his fifteen minutes of fame and then disappear from history.

crowd Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!

{Judas walks alone.}

Judas *[to himself]* This is all wrong! These people should be marching *with* us, not standing to the side cheering us on. People who cheer are worthless! If the Romans were to swoop down on us right now, these people would scatter like dry leaves in the wind. What is he thinking? What's his agenda? I need to figure this out - and fast!

crowd Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!

Scene 4

Jesus , Mary , Peter , Phillip , Thomas

{At one point in this scene, the crowd will start chanting "Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might" and this is meant to be the Sanctus from the Eucharist. I use the Episcopal words here, but if your church uses a different version, please chant it instead. And if your church uses a sung version in its services, by all means sing it!}

{Phillip and Thomas walk along together.}

Phillip Look at this crowd! How did they all know?

Thomas It must have been that farm couple. The man told us we'd see him again!

Phillip You're always looking for a rational explanation for everything! Why can't you believe this is just *magic*? It would be a lot more fun.

Thomas Well, I'll tell you, there's one thing I can't explain rationally: If there was no arrangement in place, how did the rabbi know we'd find a donkey's colt at that farm? And how did he know they'd let us have it?

Phillip I didn't think about that.

Thomas I'm beginning to think this might not be a suicide mission, after all. I'm beginning to think he might really have the power!

Phillip Wow, I'm surprised to hear you say that. We might just make a *believer* out of *you*!

{The crowd begins throwing flowers along the road.}

crowd *[chanting/singing the first half of the Sanctus]*
Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might!
Heaven and earth are full of your glory!
Hosanna in the highest!

{Mary and Peter walk the flower strewn road.}

Mary Oh, they're so beautiful!

Peter This is amazing!

Mary I used to dream of the flowers that would decorate my wedding. Now I dream of my funeral. Bouquets of irises and sun roses and anemones. Lilies on my casket, raising their faces to Heaven...

Peter With all these people behind us, there's no way we can lose!
[shouting above the din of the crowd] WE RULE!!!!

Mary A fairy tale coronation, just like a fairy tale wedding! And we'll live happily every after.

crowd *[chanting/singing the second half of the Sanctus]*
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest!

Jesus *[speaking to himself hypnotically in verse as he rides]*
One more day til what they think will happen
Disappears into the what-must-be.
Who will abide that Day, and who will weaken?
I ask of *them* what I should ask of *me*!
The Father's will, always the Father's will,
Like steps upon a road that never ends...
Until it does. And will I drink in full
The Cup that will be offered to me then?

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