The Entrance into Jerusalem

Christ's entry into Jerusalem | Pietro Lorenzetti, early 14th c. | Basilica of San Francesco d'Assisi | Assisi, Italy

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Context

Jesus has been traveling toward Jerusalem since Luke 9:51 (the conclusion of the Lucan narrative of the Transfiguration). The final approach to the holy city is marked with a third passion prediction (18:31-34), two scenes in the nearby city of Jericho (18:35-43; 19:1-10) and the parable of the talents (19:11-27) – the latter of which highlights a kingly figure coming to claim what was rightfully his. With this preceding, Jesus makes his entrance procession into Jerusalem.

As Culpepper [366] notes, "Entrance processions were a familiar ceremony in the first century. Numerous kings and conquering generals had entered Jerusalem over the years. Although the welcoming ceremony of a conqueror and the celebration of the return of a victorious general can be distinguished from each other, they

share similar features. Paul Brooks Duff has summarized the characteristic pattern of an entrance procession as follows:"

In such Greco-Roman entrance processions we have seen the following elements: (1) the conqueror/ruler is escorted into the city by the citizenry or the army of the conqueror. (2) The procession is accompanied by hymns and/or acclamations. (3) The Roman triumph has shown us that various elements in the procession … symbolically depict the authority of the ruler. (4) The entrance is followed by a ritual of appropriation, such as sacrifice, which takes place in the temple, whereby the ruler symbolically appropriates the city.

As examples of this pattern, scholars cite Josephus's account of Alexander the Great's entrance into Jerusalem and Plutarch's description of Antony's entry into Ephesus:

> Then all the Jews together greeted Alexander with one voice and surrounded him … [then] he gave his hand to the high priest and, with the Jews running beside him, entered the city. Then he went up to the temple where he sacrificed to God under the direction of the high priest
>
> When Antony made his entrance into Ephesus, women arrayed like Baccanals, and men and boys like satyrs and Pans, led the way before him, and the city was full of ivy and thyrsus-wands and harps and pipes and flutes, the people hailing him as Dionysius Giver of Joy and Beneficent.

The entrance into Jerusalem marks the end of the travel dialogue, marking a new section in Luke's narrative, but it also marks a transition in themes that Luke emphasizes. Green [680-82] also offers keen insights

(1) Christology and Discipleship. Given the great concern of the travel narrative overall with the resocialization of Jesus' followers within the new community gathered around Jesus, the lack of interest in discipleship here may be surprising. However, following Luke's presentation of the disciples' incapacity to comprehend God's plan in 18:31–34 (3rd prediction of the Passion), the disciples have receded more and more into the background. Indeed, at this juncture whatever had earlier distinguished the twelve from the others has been blurred. Luke's reference to "two of the disciples" (19:29) leaves open the question whether these are from the twelve, and his depiction of "the whole multitude of the disciples" (v 37) is reminiscent of the mass of Jesus' followers and hangers-on in 6:17–19 (Sermon on the Plain). This gradual de-emphasis on the disciples is matched in the narrative by a crescending preoccupation with christology. Begun already in 18:35–43 with the acclamation of Jesus as the "Son of David" and continuing with the parable material in 19:11–27 (10 gold coins parable) is Luke's renewed interest in portraying Jesus as the Davidic Messiah, a king. This itself recalls the birth narrative, where Jesus' identity was first broached so definitely by God's spokesperson, Gabriel (e.g., 1:32–35). And this emphasis moves even more into the limelight here, above all with the acclamation of Jesus as "*the king who comes in the name of the Lord*" (19:38).

(2) Division in Israel. Early on, Simeon had foretold that Jesus would be the cause of division within Israel (2:34–35), and Luke has narrated the realization of this prophecy in both the Galilean and journey sections of the Third Gospel. The strength of the presentation of this motif in this narrative section is unprecedented. Division comes to the fore, first, in the different responses elicited by Jesus' entry into Jerusalem: Some praised God for all the powerful deeds they had seen while others insist that Jesus silence his followers (19:37–40). Second, in his oracle concerning Jerusalem, Jesus observes that Jerusalem had failed to recognize both the things that make for peace and the time of divine visitation (vv 42, 44). Finally, the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem and the people divide in their respective responses to Jesus, with the leaders looking for a way to execute Jesus (vv 47–48). With this, the opposition against Jesus has reached rare heights (though cf. 6:11 - debates about the Sabbath; 13:31). Even this has been foretold, and related to Jesus' advent in Jerusalem (9:22, 44; 17:25; 18:31–33).

(3) Salvation to All. Soteriology (theology of salvation), so important throughout the travel narrative (and, indeed, the theme of Luke-Acts as a whole), is not altogether absent from this narrative section, even if it is less explicit than has been the norm. As will become clear, the entrance of the king into Jerusalem has soteriological implications as it raises interpretive questions about the nature of his dominion. Of interest, too, is Jesus' oracle

concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, a statement that portends not only the end of the city itself but perhaps more importantly the end of its socio-religious role as the dominant "cultural center" within the world of the narrative. "Culture centers" are active centers of social order that "… consist in the point or points in a society where its leading ideas come together with its leading institutions to create an arena in which the events that most vitally affect its members' lives take place." Within the Lukan narrative, the Jerusalem temple is seen to serve a world-ordering function, particularly as its architecture provides a series of segregating zones that extend out from the temple mount to determine social relations and the experience of fictive kinship between Jew and Samaritan, Jew and Gentile, male and female, and so on. If Jerusalem is utterly destroyed (with no stone left on another, 19:44), then its socio-religious role is also decimated. If Jerusalem is no longer the center of the world, then the status distinctions it embodied and propagated are no longer definitive. In this light, the citation of Isa 56:7 in v 46, "My house shall be a house of prayer," lacking the phrase "for all peoples," is telling, for it runs counter to the eschatological vision of all peoples coming to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh and paves the way for a mission that is centrifugal rather than centripetal (cf. Acts 1:8).

Commentary

Luke portrays Jesus' entry into the holy city in four scenes (vv. 28–48), the first two concerned with the acquisition of a colt for the short trip from the Mount of Olives to the city and the entry itself (vv. 28–40). These two serve a common theme—namely, Jesus' royal personage. As will become evident, the whole process from obtaining a colt to the crowds' proclaiming Jesus king is wrapped in the eschatological expectation and scriptural allusion (esp. Psalm 118 and Zech 9:9). As mentioned yesterday, this is a royal person entering a city – not to claim kingship, but as the follow-on to an already achieved victory. This is important because it suggests that Jesus is not about to assert his royal status. This accords well with his acclamation as king even before his birth (1:32–35; the Annunciation), and with an interpretation of the preceding chapters of the Lukan narrative as developing the nature of Jesus' kingship and, therefore, of his kingdom. What Luke is about to narrate, then, assumes the portrait of Jesus already established, with its salvific emphasis on good news to those living on the margins of society (4:18–19; proclaiming the good news in the synagogue in Nazareth).

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Jesus' approach to the city is emphasized by the repeated use of the verb for "to draw near" (*engizō*) in this part of the narrative (19:11, 29, 37, 41). The carefully orchestrated securing of the donkey is probably meant to convey Jesus' foreknowledge of these events. Rationalizing explanations suggesting that Jesus had previously arranged for the use of the donkey might explain Jesus' ability to tell the disciples where the donkey would be tied, but hardly do justice to the instruction he gives the disciples regarding what they are to say when they are challenged by its owners. Again, the detail and the repetition of the declaration "*The Master has need of it*" suggest that these words convey a christological affirmation. The events are unfolding according to God's foreordained redemptive purposes—as will all that follows.

[35] So they brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks over the colt, and helped Jesus to mount. [36] As he rode along, the people were spreading their cloaks on the road; [37] and now as he was approaching the slope of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of his disciples began to praise God aloud with joy for all the mighty deeds they had seen. [38] They proclaimed: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the

Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” [39] Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, rebuke your disciples.” [40] He said in reply, “I tell you, if they keep silent, the stones will cry out!”

In Matthew 21:4, the sacred author makes specific reference to OT scripture: “*This happened so that what had been spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled.*” Matthew is pointing to Zechariah 9:9–10

> *[9] Rejoice heartily, O daughter Zion, shout for joy, O daughter Jerusalem! See, your king shall come to you; a just savior is he, Meek, and riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass. [10] He shall banish the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; The warrior’s bow shall be banished, and he shall proclaim peace to the nations. His dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.*

Most scholars agree that this is also the imagery that Luke is echoing even as Luke’s account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem conforms to the motif of the royal processions of the ancient near east as kings and conquerors entered the capital cities. Consider the basic elements of the Lukan account:

1. Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem is punctuated by people who spread their cloaks on the road (v.36) and by “*the whole multitude of his disciples*” (v.37).
2. The procession is accompanied by hymns of praise; in this case a verse from the Hallel psalms (Ps 118:26).
3. Various elements of the procession depict the authority of Jesus; Jesus’ divine knowledge is illustrated by his commanding the disciples to bring the colt, the spreading of cloaks on the road, praise of God for Jesus’ “*mighty deeds*,” and praise of Jesus as the bringer of peace and glory in heaven.
4. Jesus’ reign over the city is seen by his later prophetic act of weeping over the city, his oracle of destruction, his entry into the Temple as God’s emissary, and the act of driving out the merchants from the Temple area.

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As Stoffregen notes, Luke’s account is one that challenges our memory with his own telling of the events. “It is quite ironic to read this as the processional gospel on ‘Palm’ Sunday. There are no ‘branches of palms’ mentioned in Luke's account as in John (12:13). There are no ‘leaves from the field’ as in Mark (11:8). There are no ‘branches from the trees’ as in Matthew (21:8). There are no leaves or branches of any type mentioned in Luke. (Note that only John talks about ‘palms’!)”

Stoffregen goes on to note other unique Lucan contributions: “When Jesus enters Jerusalem only Luke tells us:

1 ...the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen (v. 37).

2 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop." He answered, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out" (vv. 39-40).

In Luke, the entrance of Jesus causes a division among the crowd which is not found in the other gospels. Related to this emphasis, the disciples in Luke do not shout ‘hosanna’ – an Aramaic phrase meaning, ‘Save us, I pray.’ What is anticipated at the coming of the king is ‘peace in heaven and glory in the highest.’ Peace (*eirene*) is emphasized in Luke (14 occurrences in Luke, 6 in John, 4 in Matthew, and 1 in Mark; 7 in Acts). This theme begins at the end of Zechariah's song: ‘to guide our feet into the

way of **peace**.' (1:79). It continues with the angel's song: '*Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth **peace** among those whom he favors!*' (2:14). It shows up in Simeon's song: '*Master, now you are dismissing your servant in **peace**, according to your word*.' (2:29) An emphasis for Luke is that salvation consists partly in living at peace with God and with each other -- Jews and Gentiles, male and female, rich and poor, slaves and free."

[38] They proclaimed: "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord. Peace in heaven and glory in the highest."

The kingship motif that is implicit in the details of the processional entrance to this point becomes explicit in the praise of the multitude: "*Blessed is the king*…." The verse is drawn from one of the Hallel psalms (Ps 118:26), which was used to welcome pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the pilgrimage festivals. Luke, however, has added both the royal title "the king" and the last couplet. The use of the title contributes to the kingship motif developed by the acclamation of Jesus as the "Son of David" in Jericho (18:38–39), the parable of the greedy and vengeful king (19:11–27), and by the overtones of the entrance procession. The last couplet echoes the words of the heavenly host at Jesus' birth (2:14). Now, Jesus is hailed as the bringer of "peace in heaven" and "glory in the highest heaven." Jesus' reign as king will bring shalom on the earth and glory to God.

Culpepper [370] writes, "Jesus was a king, but no ordinary one—the king of fishermen, tax collectors, Samaritans, harlots, blind men, demoniacs, and cripples. Those who followed Jesus were a ragtag bunch, pathetically unfit for the grand hopes that danced in their imaginations. There were women who now leaped with joy, a Samaritan leper with a heart full of gratitude, a crippled woman who had been unable to stand straight with dignity for eighteen years, and a blind man who had followed Jesus all the way from Jericho. The cloaks thrown on the road that day were not expensive garments but tattered shawls and dusty, sweat-stained rags. Jesus was the king of the oppressed and suffering. He shared their hardships, relieved their suffering, accepted them when others deemed them unacceptable, gave them hope, and embodied God's love for them. Now they came to march with him into the holy city. Only a few days later, on their way home, they would say to one another, "But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel" (24:21)."

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The first sign of opposition to Jesus in Jerusalem arises in the response of the Pharisees to the phenomenon of Jesus' approach to the city. They order Jesus to rebuke his disciples—and thereby reject their accolades of messianic kingship. Jesus, however, responds with an allusion to Habakkuk's words of judgment: "*[9] Woe to him who pursues evil gain for his household, setting his nest on high to escape the reach of misfortune! [10] You have devised shame for your household, cutting off many peoples, forfeiting your own life: [11] For the stone in the wall shall cry out, and the beam in the woodwork shall answer it!*" (Habakkuk 2:9-11)

Jesus' response echoes the earlier warning John the Baptist had proclaimed to the religious leaders: "*[8] Produce good fruits as evidence of your repentance; and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones.*" (Luke 3:8) Luke prepares the reader for the full import of Jesus' announcement that "*they will not leave one stone upon another within you because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.*" (19:44). This ominous warning is all the more devastating because this is the last reference to the Pharisees in Luke. They have consistently opposed Jesus. Now they are silenced and pass from the scene. If the people

did not cry out in praise, God would raise up another people to fulfill God's purposes—even from the stones.

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