

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! (Luke 19:38)

The somewhat solemn process of writing obituaries is something that ministers not only do in our synod

- For publication in the directory, but are often invited to do in our conduct of funeral services
- As the presentation of a eulogy has often effectively become a short biography of the person remembered
- And though in some denominations only a sermon is thought to be the correct content
- People seem to appreciate a summary of the life of the person they have come to remember
- Even if most of the people know most of the summary already

Over the years, in conducting as many as 1,000 funerals, I have developed my own pattern of doing this

- And have hopefully become reasonably adept at preparing these short biographies
- And while I appreciate that in the loss of a loved one, people inevitably want to talk about the last days
- The whole conversation eventually includes the whole of a person's life
- And not just the last few days – so that often, the main content of these small biographies
- Becomes the vigorous years of a person's life – at work and in active retirement

That's one of the reasons why we ought not to regard the four Gospels as biographies of the life of Jesus

- Mark, for example, says nothing about his birth – beginning with the 30-year-old Jesus and his ministry
- Similarly, John, though he gives a majestic prologue about the 'word becoming flesh'
- Makes no reference to anything before the ministry of Jesus began in Galilee
- Matthew offers some information (presumably from Joseph) about the birth of Jesus and the Magi
- Luke offers some information (presumably from Mary) about the annunciation, the birth of Jesus
- Jesus being taken to the Temple as a baby and lost in the Temple as a 12-year-old

The story of the ‘Triumphal Entry’ is an important part not only of the three synoptic Gospels,

- Matthew, Mark and Luke being so-called because they record a synopsis or summary,
- But also of John – showing how important it was in the thinking of the evangelists
- Matthew 21, Mark 11, Luke 19 and John 12 bring us to the last week of Jesus’ life and ministry
- All four Gospels giving several chapters to the last week of Jesus’ life
- Showing these four accounts are not biographies – not in the sense that we would understand biography
- It seems as if the focus of the Gospel-writers is very much on the death of Jesus and what it means
- And what will unfold in the Gospel narratives represents the people’s response to Jesus

Another critical event in the life of Jesus, recorded by all the synoptic Gospels is the transfiguration

- It is a pivotal point in the ministry of Jesus who, from Luke 9:31, heads to Jerusalem for the last time
- His journey to Jerusalem is linked with his being taken up to heaven (Luke 9:51)
- It is because he was heading for Jerusalem that the Samaritans did not welcome him
- He went on teaching in the towns and villages on his way to Jerusalem (Luke 13:22)
- Threatened by Herod, Jesus went on, saying ‘surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!’ (Luke 13:33)
- and Jesus speaks with compassion for Jerusalem, despite the way it behaves (Luke 13:34)
- throughout the Gospel, Jesus predicted his death (Luke 18:31-34) – it would be at Jerusalem
- so that when Jesus reached the edge of Jerusalem, Luke’s readers are both prepared and yet unprepared
- the arrival of Jesus at Jerusalem is the climax of this section of the Gospel
- only the passion narrative and the account of his resurrection are to follow now
- the ministry of Jesus was preaching the Kingdom of God, for Jews that meant the reign of the Messiah
- but Jesus shows that he is not the kind of militaristic leader that they expected rather he is:

I THE MISUNDERSTOOD MESSIAH

The story of the procuring of the donkey does seem to be disproportionately long but Luke must have a reason

- stories about donkeys abound at Christmas and Easter, though the Bible has no Christmas donkey
- but Luke includes details even about the password to be given to those who owned the colt
- Luke is emphasising the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, from Zechariah
- and the fulfilment of the words of Jesus, for all is 'as he told them'
- the point that the colt has not been ridden means that it is unspoiled by previous use
- and therefore suitable for a sacred purpose (Num. 19:2; 1 Sam. 6:7) to be ridden by a king

In Israel being king was not necessarily a matter of bloodline; someone could be made king by acclamation

- such an acclamation had been made for Jehu (2 Kings 9:13) when his officers acclaimed him king
- spreading their cloaks before him; now Jesus arrives at Jerusalem but he comes in peace, on a donkey
- the donkey was often the mount of a priest; but Luke depicts him also arriving to the acclaim of a king
- Jesus comes to Jerusalem as king and priest, but he is misunderstood, for he comes not as a revolutionary
- his priesthood is also misunderstood, for he comes not to make a sacrifice, but to be a sacrifice
- The followers (disciples in its widest sense) begin to praise God for all Jesus' miracles
- 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!' (words reminiscent of Psalm 118:26)
- 'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' (words reminiscent of the heavenly host, Luke 2:14)
- Jesus implies that if he stops his disciples praising then the stones will cry out
- He had said that from the stones God could raise up children for Abraham (3: 8)
- Yet the climax of this story is not so much his entering Jerusalem but his weeping over the city

II THE MERCIFUL MESSIAH

One of the great views in the world is the view of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives

- Jesus is still outside Jerusalem as he utters this lament, only recorded by Luke
- the word ‘wept’ would almost be better translated ‘wailed’, for this is no sentimental or nostalgic tear
- Jesus’ concern for the city includes a prediction of its destruction – the name Jerusalem means ‘peace’
- the amazing irony is that the King of kings, the Prince of Peace is at the gate, the day of God’s visitation
- Jesus must have looked across to the Temple at Jerusalem, one of the great buildings of the ancient world
- While Solomon’s Temple had been destroyed, a second Temple was built after the return of the exiles
- in the time of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, and greatly renovated and improved by Herod
- The Temple was built of white marble, covered with heavy plates of gold, conspicuous and dazzling
- the historian Josephus compared it to a snow covered mountain – at this, Jesus looks across and weeps

Luke is undoubtedly very interested in the Temple, it was here that the aged Zechariah had his vision

- announcing the birth of a son, John the Baptist (Luke 1:5-25)
- here that the infant Jesus was presented and greeted by Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:21-38)
- here that the twelve year old Jesus amazed the Temple rabbis by his understanding (Luke 2:39-52)
- when Mary and Joseph discovered him he was ‘in his Father’s house’ (Luke 2:49)
- Luke makes nothing at all of the entry of Jesus into the city instead he takes us to the Temple
- The special meeting place of God and man, at the heart of the faith of Israel
- Jesus’ arrival at the Temple as priest and king sets the scene for the passion narrative

III THE MURDERED MESSIAH

The frequent conflict between Jesus and religious leaders is becoming decisive in the Temple

- For, in the Temple area, Jesus began driving out those who were selling (Luke 19:45-46)
- saying: ‘It is written, “My house will be a house of prayer” but you have made it “a den of robbers”’
- among other things the trade would have been the exchange for Temple coinage
- special ‘holy’ money for sacred work but the exchange was a racket, ‘holy’ money was ‘dishonest’

Luke is very interested in Jesus in his role as teacher, pointing out that Jesus taught in the Temple every day

- but the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the leaders among the people were trying to kill him
- Yet they could not find any way to do it, because all the people hung on his words
- The leaders among the people wanted to kill him, yet the ordinary people were hanging on his words
- Luke often makes the comparison between the leaders and the crowds of people they influenced

For Luke Christianity is the true continuation of the faith of Israel

- its central figure is Jesus, Son of God, Saviour of the World
- he is the king, who dies, rejected by his people; he is the priest who dies for the people on Calvary’s cross
- Of John the Baptist, the forerunner, the prophet Malachi (3:1) spoke:

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.

(Malachi 3:1)

So, with the arrival of the priest-king Saviour of the World in the Temple, the scene is set

- The religious leaders had hoped to arrest Jesus after the Passover (Matt. 26:3-5), but Jesus
- the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the World (Jn 1:29), will be the Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7)
- Looking at the city and Temple, no matter which way he looked, Jesus could find cause for weeping
- If he looked back he saw a history of missed opportunities and was ignorant of his divine visitation
- If he looked around he saw religious activity that accomplished very little – in fact it was corrupt
- If he looked ahead he saw the destruction of both city and Temple
- If he looked within the hearts of the people, he saw that not everyone was thrilled at his arrival
- His arrival causes some to rejoice, others do not understand him, and still others emphatically reject him

But, spiritually speaking, we, ourselves, must now join with the crowds and go from Palm Sunday to Easter Day

- Jesus was undoubtedly, ‘the misunderstood Messiah’ but also ‘the merciful Messiah’
- Through the people’s unbelief and disobedience, he became ‘the murdered Messiah’
- So we must address those critical questions, ‘who is Jesus?’ and ‘why did he die?’
- By faith we can meet with him, through unbelief we do no other than reject him, as he was rejected before
- And while we, in faith, can meet Jesus anywhere
- The New Testament is clear that the place where God meets us today is primarily among his people
- that is why comparing knowing the presence of God in the hills
- with knowing the presence of God in Christian worship is so unbiblical
- now it is our responsibility to enthrone Jesus as kingly-priest in the temple of our hearts
- as by acclamation we proclaim him to be king