

that reflects reality. Before appearing as man, Christ was a divine part of the Godhead.

"Equality with God... to His own advantage" – by contrast with Adam, made in God's image, and wanting to acquire divine status, Genesis 1:26-27, 3:5, Jesus, the second Adam, chose to divest Himself of divine status, vv.7-8.

7 ...rather, He made Himself nothing by taking the very nature [or form] of a servant, being made in human likeness.

"He made Himself nothing" – the Greek word is *kenōō* which means to empty, or pour out, or give up a privilege. Jesus gave up the privileged part of being God, to be able to fully identify with humankind, and be born as a Jewish baby destined for Roman execution, without giving up any of His true deity.

8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

"Found in appearance" – or human likeness. This should not be taken as merely looking like a man; without ceasing to be God, He clothed Himself in authentic humanity.

• **For further study** on "God sent His Son, born of a woman... the one mediator... the man Christ Jesus" etc, see Galatians 4:4, 1 Timothy 2:5, John 1:14, Romans 8:3, Hebrews 2:17.

IN PRACTICE Writing around 30 years after the Resurrection of Christ – a close memory but a generation's worth of time to reflect – Paul reminds readers in the churches of Jesus' more unexpected attributes. Here is someone who had everything, but gave that up to enter the world with nothing. Mind-boggling signs and wonders followed His teaching, yet he exuded Galilean ordinariness. He emptied Himself of "self" and so could be honoured with the highest degree of lordship. This is not the world's way, and it is a hard act to follow – but following is the response to believing, in that order. The first and most essential qualification for anyone who senses any kind call to lead – is to be a good follower, able to put aside "self".

QUESTION "Think of yourself the way Christ Jesus thought of Himself" – what for you is the hardest part of that?

PRAYER Lord, You remind us that we are made in Your image, yet we persist in trying to make You conform to our image. Forgive us. Help us to shrug off the need for position and recognition and to grow a servant heart, with Your help. Amen.

9 Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name...

"Exalted Him" – 'exalted' translates a rare Greek word to draw out how the resurrection overturned Christ's death, but there would follow the complete reversal, from worldly weakness and shame to heavenly highest honour, authority and power.

"The name that is above" – there were moments in Jesus' earthly ministry of His deity being recognised, e.g. Matt. 14:33. Jesus was not then generally addressed as "the Lord" as Paul calls Him now, 15 times in Philippians alone. "Lord" is a divine title of God representing the OT name Yahweh.

10 ...that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth...

11 ...and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

"Every tongue acknowledge" – God's plan is for people everywhere, and all creation and all spiritual powers, to worship and serve Jesus as Lord, acknowledging His authority.

• **For further study**, see Isaiah 45:23, Romans 14:9, Ephesians 1:9-10 and 21, Colossians 1:20-25, 1 Peter 3:22.

The Living Word

The Bible readings for Sunday, April 14, 2019 with commentary notes

www.thelivingword.uk PRINT EDITION

Revised Common Lectionary readings for **April 14** in Bible order

Prepare for Sunday by reading the Bible passages beforehand – read again to reflect on Sunday's teaching

Palm Sunday. Theme: The Lord of the unexpected – a king who serves

Isaiah 50:4-9a – An unexpected view of the Sovereign Lord's special servant

Luke 19:28-40 – Jesus enters Jerusalem in an unexpected way

Philippians 2:5-11 – Christ the Messiah was not at all as people expected

Also read: Psalm 31:9-16

Isaiah 50:4-9a – an unexpected view of the Sovereign Lord's servant

His faithful obedience will bring Him contempt, hatred, false accusation and beating

The third of four 'servant songs' or prophecies, picturing the faithful and suffering servant who experiences rejection as a prophet. The first hearers may have seen the servant as depicting a purified Israel. Much later the unmistakable allusions to Jesus Christ became apparent.

4 The Sovereign Lord has given Me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary.

He wakens Me morning by morning, wakens My ear to listen like one being instructed.

"The Sovereign Lord" – The majestic title *Adonai Yahweh* is used four times as the One who has given the prophet the ability to hear and speak forth for Him.

5 The Sovereign Lord has opened My ears; I have not been rebellious, I have not turned away.

The servant is well versed in the Word of God (v.4) but also an obedient listener, Isaiah 1:19, Psalm 40:6

6 I offered My back to those who beat Me, My cheeks to those who pulled out

My beard; I did not hide My face from mocking and spitting.

"I offered My back... I will not be disgraced" – the connection to Jesus' trial and crucifixion cannot be a coincidence, Matt. 27:27-31.

"Those who beat Me" – beating was treatment given to fools, and spitting and pulling out the beard showed contempt and hatred. The rejection of the Servant grows more intense as the Servant Songs progress, Isaiah 49:7, 50:6, 52:14-53:9.

• **For further study:** Prov. 10:13; 19:29; 26:3; Matt. 27:26; John 19:1, 2 Sam. 10:4 – 5; Neh. 13:25, Job 30:10, Deut 25:9; Job 17:6; Matt 27:30.

7 Because the Sovereign Lord helps Me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set My face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.

8 He who vindicates Me is near. Who then will bring charges against Me? Let us face each other! Who is My accuser? Let him confront Me!

"Vindicates Me" – the Lord will find Him righteous, Isaiah 45:25, 1 Tim. 3:16. Christ, being sinless, also nullifies charges brought against those who believe in Him. Romans 8:31-34.

9 It is the Sovereign Lord who helps Me. Who will condemn Me? They will all

wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.

"Who will condemn Me?" – Paul uses similar language in Romans 8:34. The servant did not

suffer because He was guilty, but as Isaiah 53:4-6 brings out, for the guilt of others. Those falsely accusing the righteous are destroyed, as moths cause a garment to fall to pieces, Isaiah 51:8.

IN PRACTICE One of the commonest questions put forward by Christian faith sceptics is why good people experience bad things – usually coupled with the misgiving that a God who is love could allow this to happen. At this time of year we are graphically reminded how God allowed unspeakably bad things to happen to His incomparably good Son. Here we have a prophetic picture of rejection and hatred that many of the OT prophets would have related to, and the parallels with what actually happened at Jesus' trial cannot be ignored. The enemy of love and truth is Satan, and he works through fear, strong-arm control, deception and confusion. The divine strategy to break that hold is by choosing the opposite spirit – and someone had to be the first to do that. That's the Suffering Servant, Jesus, and we can do the same in His name – but at the cost of what comes with the territory.

QUESTION *How prepared are you to face rejection and unfair treatment for speaking up for Christ?*

Luke 19:28-40 – Jesus enters Jerusalem in an unexpected way

His Messianic entry is victorious yet righteous and lowly, on a donkey colt.

28 After Jesus had said this, He went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem.

"After Jesus had said this" – this was on the Sunday of Passion Week.

29-30 As He approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, saying to them,

'Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here.

"Bethphage" – on the Jerusalem side of Bethany, on the road from Jericho.

"Two of His disciples" – messengers were commonly sent in pairs.

"You will find" – a prophetic insight (word of knowledge) or possibly by prior arrangement.

"Colt... which no one has... ridden" – a donkey

colt, with its mother, John 12:15, Matt. 21:7. As an unridden animal it was available for sacred service, Mark 11:2.

31 If anyone asks you, "Why are you untying it?" say, "The Lord needs it."

"If anyone asks you" – religious or political leaders, or Roman soldiers, might borrow property for a short time; and Jesus was a king (v.38).

32-33 Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as he had told them. As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, 'Why are you untying the colt?'

34 They replied, 'The Lord needs it.'

35 They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it.

"Put Jesus on it" – a grown man on a young donkey looked like a peacemaker, not a conqueror.

Onlookers would have known Zechariah's prophecy, Zech. 9:9 "Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king

comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey."

36 As He went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

"Spread their cloaks" – an act of homage, hailing Him as king, 2 Kings 9:13.

37 When He came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

"All the miracles" – Lazarus raised from the dead and Bartimaeus having his sight restored were recent events, and people would remember others in both Jerusalem and Galilee, Matt. 21:14, John 12:17.

"Whole crowd of disciples" – who had already been impacted by the miracles, and Jesus' teaching. They

praised God without understanding what they were seeing in Jesus entering the city, Luke 20:9-18.

38 'Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'

"Blessed is the king who comes..." – see Psalms 118:26, 148:1. Psalm 118, the last of six psalms festival-goers sang on their way to Jerusalem, was a messianic proclamation to which they added the word 'king', to the annoyance of the Pharisees.

39 Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples!'

40 'I tell you,' He replied, 'if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out.'

"The stones will cry out" – if the disciples were silenced, God would bring out His truth another way, e.g. by a miracle.

IN PRACTICE "How will I look" or "How will it look" are questions we all ask. To a greater or lesser extent, we all have at least some concern about our 'image' – how we appear to others. Not so Jesus. He didn't cut a fine figure with legs near the ground on a small donkey – not an authority figure but recognisably a prophetic one. He did the unexpected, but the unexpected was just as Zechariah's Messiah had been predicted to behave. The important thing was to show Himself as who He was, for people to recognise and believe. That's all that is required of us – to turn to the king and believe in Him. The church has often made salvation complicated, and found ways for people to, as it were, earn a good report on death. But Jesus bypasses all of that in one very straightforward question: "Do you now believe?" (John 16:31).

QUESTION *How might you be pursuing a complicated route to faith, when Jesus may be asking something unexpected – to simply believe and trust Him?*

Philippians 2:5-11 – Christ the Messiah was not as people expected

Having made Himself nothing and suffering a shameful death, He was exalted by God above all others

Quoting a very early Christian hymn, this is a succinct, powerful declaration of Christ's divine nature and preexistence, His incarnation, death, subsequent exaltation and present lordship.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus...

"Have the same mindset" – in The Message, "Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself". Christians are to have Jesus' self-sacrificing deferral to the Father and love for others.

6 ...who, being in very nature [or in the form of] God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to His own advantage...

"In very nature" – not just appearance, but a form