

Holy Week @ Home

FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

This liturgy is written for preschool and primary school-aged children but can be adjusted to accommodate older siblings. It is designed to create a space for prayer as a family, and to teach your children about the Palm Sunday story, when Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey and was greeted by an excited crowd. You might like to add to your prayer space over Holy Week (for example, by keeping a branch there after Palm Sunday) so that your children feel like they are on a journey through this special time.

You will need:

- a suitable space in your house for the liturgy (such as a lounge room or rumpus room), preferably with a 'prayer table' as a focus point
- a Bible
- garden scissors or secateurs
- colouring pencils, crayons or markers, and paper
- music (see suggestions below, or choose something your family is already familiar with)
- props and costumes for the re-enactment (tea towels for head pieces, adult-sized shirts for clothing etc.).

PREPARE

Prepare your prayer table. Only if it is possible and safe to do so, you may wish to go outdoors with your children to collect some branches, just as the people of Jerusalem did in the time of Jesus. You may wish to explain that palm leaves symbolise triumph and peace. If you don't have olive branches or palm leaves, don't worry: any branches will do.

Get comfortable in your prayer space: pull out cushions or settle in comfortable chairs and focus your attention on the prayer table. Explain that you will be spending some time with Jesus and remembering his story.

ABOUT TODAY

Today we celebrate Palm Sunday. It is a special day in the church's calendar in which Jesus rides into Jerusalem in triumph to be greeted by an excited crowd. It is also the start of Holy Week. Holy Week consists of:

- Palm Sunday
- Holy Thursday (the Last Supper)
- Good Friday (the passion and crucifixion)
- Easter Sunday (the resurrection).

You could ask school-aged children what they already know about Palm Sunday and Holy Week.

GETTING STARTED

Sing a song that your family knows or one of the following: '[I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy](#)', '[Cloaks and Branches](#)', '[Hosanna](#)'. You may wish to invite school-aged children to choose the song or lead the opening prayer.

Say an opening prayer such as:

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for bringing us together today. We thank you for all the blessings in our lives such as our family, our friends ...

We ask you to be with us now as we read your story and learn about who you are. Please open our eyes, our ears and our hearts to what you will show us.

Amen.

GOSPEL

Open up your Bible to Matthew 21:1–11 and proclaim the gospel to your family, reading about what happened on the 'first Palm Sunday'. You might like to ask a school-aged child to lead the reading of the gospel.

At the end, ask your children to tell you what happened in the passage and help them summarise the story.

Repetition and active engagement help young children to learn new things, so a good way to reinforce this story is through role-playing. You are encouraged to get into costume (whatever you have lying around), and the adults are encouraged to narrate the story and direct or act with the young ones. If you have gathered branches, you may use them during the role play. Those who don't want to role-play could watch this [animated adaptation](#) of the Palm Sunday story.

REFLECT

Depending on how your little ones are going, you may wish to have some reflection and wondering time, or spend some time drawing and colouring scenes from the gospel story, or both!

Some good questions and prompts for discussion with small children are:

- What did you find interesting?
- I wonder how the people felt when they saw Jesus entering their home town ...
- What do we learn about Jesus from this story?
- I wonder why the people of Jerusalem laid out their cloaks and branches ...

For older children:

- I wonder why Jesus chose to enter Jerusalem on a donkey and not in a more impressive way ...
- I wonder how Jesus felt entering Jerusalem ...

Returning to your prayer space, briefly summarise everything you have done and the key points or messages from your discussion and reflection—keep it simple for younger children.

RESPOND

Conclude by singing a song together—'[Hosanna](#)', '[Jesus Loves Me](#)' or '[This Little Light of Mine](#)' for instance—or saying a prayer such as:

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for the time that we have had together, learning more about you. We pray that we can be humble like you and ask that you bless our family and the day to come.

(Ask your children if there is anything in particular they wish to pray. You could conclude with a Hail Mary or Our Father.)

Amen.