

Palm Sunday Art – prepared by Dr Sophia Errey

Around 1305 Giotto was engaged, with his team of painters, in painting all of the surfaces of a chapel in Padua in fresco – painting into damp patches of plaster so that the paint chemically bonded to the wall. In 1308 Duccio was commissioned to paint a huge altarpiece for the Cathedral in Siena, using tempera – pigments mixed with egg – on a wooden panel. Both of them were painting a series of images of the last days of Christ's life – the Passion Cycle.

The Entry into Jerusalem is usually the first image in this cycle. Both artists show details from Matthew's account – the large crowd, the donkey, people tearing down branches and spreading cloaks on the ground before Him. We notice that although Jesus is swathed in blue, the colour of the heavens, his under robe is red, the colour of sacrifice and suffering. For both Duccio and Giotto Jerusalem was not some far away city, but looks like the little walled towns with which they were familiar.

Tissot, painting in the late 19th century, was far more concerned to achieve a degree of historical accuracy – indeed, he travelled to Israel to study the land and people before painting his major cycle of the Life of Christ.

All three artists know, as do we, that the crowd tossing branches and shouting Hosanna would in a few days become a crowd calling for the execution of the rider on the donkey and so their paintings are infused with a sense of the pathos of this procession.

Did you know?

That the stirring Palm Sunday hymn "All glory, laud and honour" ("All glory, praise and honour" in TIS) was written over 1000 years ago? Bishop Theodulph of Orleans was under house arrest for having fallen out with King Louis when in 820 he wrote the thirty nine verses which begin "Gloria, laus et honor tibi sit" (Glory, laud and honour be to you). (This explains why Melchior Teschner (1584-1635) the German/Polish composer who wrote the tune we use called it St Theodulph.)

The hymn quickly became popular, and there was already an English version by the theologian William Herebert, written around 1300, long before John Mason Neale evolved the version we now sing, revising his version of 1851 in 1861.

You can listen to a beautiful recording by the Deller Consort of Theodulph's hymn sung to the very rhythmic mediaeval tune at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmyCH4sPm6U>



Entry into Jerusalem by Giotto



Entry into Jerusalem by Duccio



Entry into Jerusalem by Tissot