

OPEN MINDS, BURNING HEARTS

Journeying through Luke's Gospel: IV. Jerusalem

Text: Luke 19:28-44

1. The Last Stage of the Jerusalem Road



At long last, we arrive (after ten chapters) at destination: holy city of Jerusalem. Final ascent from Jericho is 258 metres below sea level, over Mount of Olives, affording a spectacular view of both Jerusalem and the Temple. Preceding parable of pounds (Luke 19:11-27) is significant as the setting: a man going to a new country to be appointed king; and his compatriots not wanting this man to be their king.

Albrecht Dürer, *Christ's Entry into Jerusalem* (c. 1509/1510)
National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, open access image.

2. Bethphage, Bethany and the Mount of Olives: Places Near Jerusalem

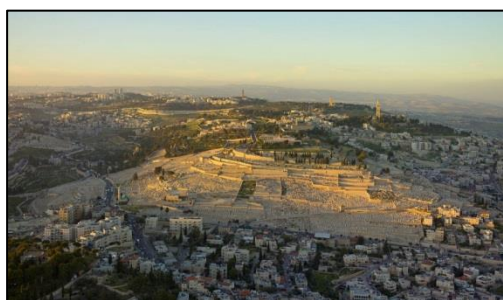
The scene begins very close to the Mount of Olives (the ultimate example of 'Location, location, location': Bethphage, Bethany and the Mount of Olives').

Bethphage and Bethany function mainly as 'scene setters' (although Bethany will be the location from which Christ ascends).



Mount of Olives more significant: place to which the Lord will come at last judgement ('On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives, which lies before Jerusalem on the east ... Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him', Zech 14:4-5 NRSV).

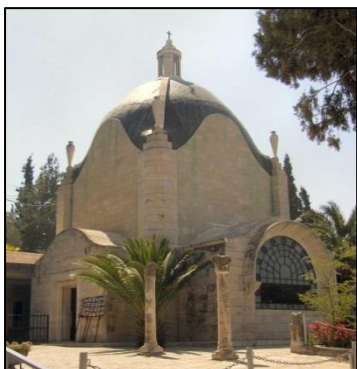
Luke records Jesus' 'not-so-triumphal approach to Jerusalem':



- modelled on accounts of a victorious ruler entering a city; but Jesus rides, not on a war horse, but a colt, and a borrowed one at that;
- Luke separates Jesus' approach from actual entry into Jerusalem by scene of Jesus weeping over city.

3. The Tears of Jesus: Weeping for Jerusalem

One of the most poignant passages in the Gospels is Jesus weeping. This is rarely recorded in scripture.



Church of *Dominus Flevit*, left, is particularly evocative.

We have another reminder of Jesus as prophet (prophet Jeremiah announced Lord's weeping over his people, and used his own tears as acted prophecy). Stone language is important here:

- 'I tell you, if these [i.e. the disciples] were silent, the stones would shout out': the city walls recognize their king.
- Yet these same stones will not be left one upon another (fall of Jerusalem).
- We might hear another echo: John the Baptist warning that God can raise up 'from these stones' children for Abraham.
- Quotation from Pope Benedict reminds us of the 'living stones', vulnerable Christian communities in Jerusalem and land of Christ's birth: *"The more we appreciate the universality and the uniqueness of Christ's person, the more we look with gratitude to that land where Jesus was born, where he lived and where he gave his life for us. The stones on which our Redeemer walked are still charged with his memory and continue to "cry out" the Good News. ... How important it is that in those places there be Christian communities, notwithstanding any number of hardships!"* (Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* 89).

Nostalgia here is a 'longing for home': because Jesus' tears and words would have had particular resonance in light of Jerusalem's destruction by Romans in 70 AD. Jerusalem here becomes a powerful and tragic symbol of other cities, communities, peoples, particularly torn apart by war.

4. "The Time of Your Visitation": What has Jerusalem Come to Mean?

Visitation is double-edged: it is both judgement and salvation. Acclamations of the disciples recall the message of the angels to the shepherds in Luke 2. Christ, the one who brings peace, is the prophet who speaks God's word, and the King coming into his kingdom, is not accepted by many people.

Questions: What does the city of Jerusalem mean at this point in the story?

How has its meaning changed?

What associations or emotions are evoked by hearing the name 'Jerusalem'?

This PDF comes from the CBCEW Scripture Working Group, based on work by Dr Ian Boxall, available from <http://www.cbcew.org.uk/bible-studies>