**FIRST STEPS TOGETHER:** FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN

Session 1 of 4

# Palm Sunday

### MEETING AIM

To celebrate with the people as Jesus arrives in Jerusalem.

### BIBLE PASSAGE

John 12:12-19

### BACKGROUND

This session plan is intended for use either in-person or online, depending on how you’re meeting. Adapt the activities to fit your particular situation.

Younger children may not understand the significance of how Jesus enters Jerusalem, but they will be familiar with the joy and celebration that accompanies his arrival. Help children to experience this celebration and then remember it when you come to explore the sadder story of Jesus’ trial and death.

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### STARTING OUT – 5 mins

Start your time together with some simple refreshments (if you can) and ask them to think about the last time they arrived somewhere – was it exciting? Did it take a long time to get there?

### PLAY – 10 mins

**You will need:** green tissue or crepe paper; child-safe scissors; sticky tape; newspaper; pictures of palm trees (optional)

Before your session, draw and cut out large leaf shapes from the tissue or crepe paper, several layers at a time. Roll several sheets of newspaper into a tight tube and secure them with a piece of tape. Make sure you have enough rolls of paper for everyone in your family to have one. If you’re working online, then you could turn this into a fun activity that families could do together before your session starts.

Give each child a newspaper roll and help them to attach the leaves to the sticks with tape. Next, show everyone how to cut slits down the sides of the leaves so they swish satisfyingly when waved (help any children who might find this difficult). During this activity, chat about what palms look like and where they grow. If you have any pictures of palm trees, show them to the children as you chat.

### BIBLE STORY – 10 mins

**You will need:** palm branches from ‘Play’; toy donkey; pieces of fabric, rugs or throws

Practise waving the branches with the children and then organise the group so that they’re sitting in two rows facing each other, holding their palms. Tell this story:

Jesus was travelling into Jerusalem for the Passover, a very important festival. Lots of other people had travelled to Jerusalem and the city was full! When they heard Jesus was coming, they got very excited. They broke palm branches off trees to wave like flags! *Encourage the children to stand up and wave their branches.*

When Jesus arrived, he was riding on a donkey. A long time ago, a man called Zechariah had written that this would happen. It was in the scriptures that the people read in their synagogues, though they didn’t remember at the time. *Move the toy donkey up and down the ‘road’ between the two lines of people. If any children want to have a go walking the donkey up and down, let them do so.*

The people began to wave their palms and shout: “Hosanna!”, “Praise God!’ and “Bless the one God has sent!” *Practise shouting these three phrases, as loud as you can! If you know a simple song that praises God like this, sing that too. As they do this, walk with the donkey along the ‘road’.*

Some people even took off their coats and cloaks, and put them on the floor in front of Jesus! *Ask a few children to put down their palm branches and help you to lay out some fabric, rugs or throws in front of the leader and the donkey.*

The people were so happy to see Jesus! *Everyone cheers together.*

### CHATTING TOGETHER – 5 mins

Ask the children these questions, making sure everyone has the chance to contribute:

* What was your favourite part of the story?
* What does it feel like when you see someone you love?
* How do you welcome others when they come to your house?
* How did the people feel when they saw Jesus?

### CREATIVE TIME – 10 mins

**You will need:** paper leaves; felt-tip pens; the outline of a branch drawn on paper; glue sticks

Ask the children how they felt when they were singing and cheering. How did they think the crowd was feeling? What did they think about Jesus? Who did they think he was? Write all the words on small paper leaves and ask the children to stick them on the branch one by one. If you’re working online, encourage the children to stick their leaves up in their homes.

Explain that the important Jewish leaders were also watching the crowd and saying to each other: “Nothing is going right for us, everyone is following Jesus.” Talk about how they were feeling. The children may understand words like ‘sad’ and ‘cross’, but you may need to explain trickier emotions such as jealousy and frustration. Add these words to the outside of your picture.

### PRAYER – 5 mins

**You will need:** palm branches from ‘Paly’; upbeat praise music and the means to play it (optional)

Ask everyone to be quiet for a moment (try this for as long as the children can manage). Then go on to say this prayer:

Thank you, Jesus, that we can celebrate you together. Help us to worship you in the fun times but also the sad times. Amen.

End your prayer time by getting your palms out and praising Jesus. If you have any praise music, play it as the children wave their palm branches around.

**XANA RIDLEY**

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