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PALMS & PSALMS

What's the big deal about Palm Sunday and Good Friday and Easter, anyway? Why should you bother to attend church services, especially this one time of year?

Well, it's only about the basic message of hope for mankind. It's only the heart of the Christian faith.

And 78% of Americans self-identify as Christians, according to a just-released "Global Religious Landscape" study by the Pew Research Center. So let's refresh your understanding of just what it means to call yourself a Christian.

"The world has gone after Him!" That's what the religious leaders declared about Jesus (John 12:19) on that first Palm Sunday nearly 2,000 years ago on a dusty lane in Jerusalem. Jesus of Nazareth had just fulfilled several key pieces of ancient prophecies regarding the promised "Messiah" written about in the holy Scriptures.

For thousands of years, the Jews had waited for the Messiah. God had made many promises over the centuries. And now they were coming true.

Why did the world need a Messiah? That goes back to the very beginning, when God promised a holy offspring to come into the world to take care of the sin problem. Sin, rebellion against God, had plagued mankind since the very beginning. God promised to fix our problem.

That's why He sent His son, whose birth we celebrate at Christmas. Jesus was no ordinary child. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary. Now on this first Palm Sunday, Jesus was completing three years of public ministry, proclaiming the good news of salvation.

Vast crowds of people were gathered in Jerusalem for a religious festival. The gospel of John 12:12-19 tells us the crowds heard Jesus was coming, so they went out to meet Him. **"So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, crying out, 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!'"**

Why did they give Jesus such a royal welcome? Palm branches laid down on the roadway and waved to greet Him were symbols of national identity. Palms and psalms were presented in honor of the person they expected to restore their nation by gaining independence from the tyrants of the Roman Empire.

"Hosanna" means "Save us now!" and the crowds called this out in anticipation of Jesus fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies, including Psalm 118:25 **"Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD."** They quoted other passages too, adding **"the King of Israel"** so no one could mistake their intentions.

With palms and psalms, they were lifting up Jesus as the Messiah, the promised King who would deliver them. Little did they know that in just a few days, these same crowds would demand that Jesus be lifted up, not on the throne of Israel but upon a cross of Roman shame, as they shouted **"Crucify Him!"**

During that Holy Week long ago, what they said and believed about Jesus reveals their eternal destiny. As Jesus went willingly to the cross to pay the penalty for the sins of the world, the Bible says that everyone who puts their trust in Him will receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This gives you God's power and purpose to live your life for Him, and then, when your earthly life is over, to live forever with Him in heaven. That's what it means to be a Christian.

So how about it? Will we see you in church on Palm Sunday, or Maundy Thursday, or Good Friday, or Easter Sunday? That's where you'll receive the GOOD NEWS that changes your life. Forever.