

Wilderness

THE WILDERNESS JOURNEY FROM PALMS TO PASSION

A CREATIVE WORSHIP LITURGY WITH
MIDRASH FOR PALM/PASSION SUNDAY

LITURGY & MIDRASH BY SARAH ARE

We invite you to implement this service as-is, or adapt it for your context. Either way, please attribute credit as follows: *Liturgy by Sarah Are* | *A Sanctified Art LLC* | sanctifiedart.org.

ABOUT THE SERVICE

- This service follows Matthew's telling of the events from Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem to his arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, highlighting a few narrative moments in between. This service is designed to be a hybrid of worship and dramatic reading. The hope is to engage people in a new way using the ancient tradition of midrash, helping teach and immerse them in the narrative flow of the Passion story.
- This service requires: two liturgists and five midrash readers. We recommend your liturgists be clergy or experienced worship leaders so that those leading the liturgical elements—music, prayers, Communion—are clearly differentiated from the midrash readers. We also recommend being selective about your midrash readers, inviting people who are willing to embody their assigned character in tone and voice.
- The script has subtle blocking suggestions. In brief, we recommend having the service start with the midrash readers seated off to the sides, in the congregation, or out of view. During the opening scripture reading, they can slowly move into center view (as if they are a crowd forming for Jesus' entry into Jerusalem). When the midrash readers are not reading, seat them at the front of the chancel, either in five chairs or five tall stools.
- We suggest rehearsing with your midrash readers. The more you prepare for this service, the more each of your readers will be able to embody their character, identifying with that person and proclaiming their story with emotion and authenticity.
- If there is a member of your congregation who has theater or acting experience, invite them to participate in this service by serving the role of director. Encourage them to create and direct some simple blocking (For example: do you want your characters to move during the litanies, etc?). Having a trained eye to offer guidance, feedback, and creativity will only enrich this service.

ABOUT THE SERVICE *(CONTINUED)*

- No props are needed for this service. However, we do recommend having five seats or stools for the five midrash readers, as well as five simple black folders for their scripts.
- You may wish to print the midrash scripts in the bulletin so that worshipers can follow along, as there are moments when the dramatic readings shift into call and response liturgy. We imagine you will want to make copies of the full order of worship (w/ leadership notes) for each of the liturgists and midrash readers

ABOUT THIS LITURGY OUTLINE

- *Italicized lines* are notes for worship leaders.
- Unbolded lines are to be spoken by worship leaders and, when appropriate, printed in bulletins or projected on screens.
- **Bolded lines** are to be spoken by the congregation and printed in bulletins or projected on screens.

KEY FOR MIDRASH READERS/CHARACTERS

M1= Midrash reader #1: A woman in the temple who witnessed Jesus flip the tables

M2= Midrash reader #2: A Pharisee

M3= Midrash reader #3: The woman with the alabaster jar who anointed Jesus' feet

M4= Midrash reader #4: Judas

M5= Midrash reader #5: A disciple in the garden of Gethsemane

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FULL ORDER OF WORSHIP WITH LITURGY & LEADER NOTES

GATHERING AROUND THE WORD

OPENING VOLUNTARY

WORDS OF WELCOME

Words of welcome to the space. Include here any announcements and gathering protocols needed for your community (ie: passing of the peace or signing a friendship registry). In order to maintain a unique and intentional feel to this service, we recommend keeping announcements to a minimum. Take a moment to teach your community about the art and tradition of midrash:

LITURGIST #1 OR #2: Today is a special service because this week is unlike any other week in the Christian calendar. Today we celebrate Palm Sunday, Jesus' joyous entry into Jerusalem. But we will also turn to the events that followed, walking through the moments that led up to Jesus' arrest. We'll do this as if journeying day by day, because just like our lives, holy week happened day by day.

In our service, we will incorporate the tradition of midrash. Midrash is an ancient Jewish tradition that weaves together the art of storytelling and the truth of scripture, inviting us to imagine and wonder about the details that exist between the lines. Today you will hear from five voices: a woman who witnessed Jesus flip the tables in the temple, a Pharisee, the woman with the alabaster jar who anointed Jesus' feet in Bethany, Judas, and one of Jesus' disciples in the garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus was arrested. As you hear these stories read aloud, we invite you to lean in. Imagine yourself there. Feel the truth of this narrative—for it was a holy week, and it was a hard week. Let us begin.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Invite liturgist #1 to lead the call to worship, as liturgist #2 will proclaim the scripture immediately following the call to worship.

LITURGIST #1 OR #2: As we prepare our hearts to hear God's word creatively proclaimed, please join me in our call to worship.

GATHERING AROUND THE WORD (CONTINUED)

CALL TO WORSHIP (CONTINUED)

One: On Palm Sunday so many years ago, the people saw Jesus and asked,

All: Who is this?

One: In worship, we respond. In worship, we declare:

All: Jesus is a miracle worker and healer.

One: Jesus is a teacher and preacher.

All: Jesus is our light in the darkness.

One: Jesus is our source of love.

All: Jesus is our path in the wilderness.

One: So may we lay down our hearts like they laid down their coats.

All: Let us worship Holy God.

PROCLAIMING THE WORD TOGETHER

SCRIPTURE READING

SUNDAY | Matthew 21:1-11¹

This scripture is to be proclaimed by liturgist #2. This person almost serves as the narrator, setting the stage for the midrash. Blocking suggestion: At the close of the call to worship, have liturgist #2 move to the center of your chancel space to read Matthew 21:1-11. All five midrash readers should begin off the chancel—either sitting on the side, in the sanctuary pews, or out of sight. During the reading, they will slowly stand up and move toward liturgist #2, crisscrossing the chancel space, as if they are strangers moving through a crowd. Eventually, they will stop at a designated spot at the front of the chancel in order to offer the opening litany.

LITURGIST #2: It was Sunday morning.

1 “When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, **2** saying to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. **3** If anyone says anything to you, just say this, ‘The Lord needs them.’ And he will send them immediately.” **4** This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,

At this point, midrash readers begin moving from various locations, walking up the aisle or stairs, or from behind the chancel, moving as if they are strangers forming a crowd.

¹ We have included the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) in the liturgy script, but you are welcome to use a different translation. If you do, be sure to include the additional speaking text and blocking notes we’ve interwoven into the scripture reading.

SCRIPTURE READING

SUNDAY | Matthew 21:1-11 (CONTINUED)

LITURGIST #2:

5 “Tell the daughter of Zion,
Look, your king is coming to you,
humble, and mounted on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

6 The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; 7 they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. 8 A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. 9 The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,
“Hosanna to the Son of David!
Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

10 When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking,

Midrash readers pause, turn to face the front, and in unison say:

ALL MIDRASH READERS: "Who is this?"

LITURGIST #2: 11 The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

And this is where the story begins.

OPENING LITANY | "Who is this?"

This litany is voiced by the congregation and the five midrash readers, as we wonder together, “Who is this man with such a parade?” Invite the midrash readers to stand and deliver their lines from the front of the chancel area. During the litany, organ music can be played quietly behind the words to add depth and texture.

ALL: Who is this?

M1: I heard he was a carpenter’s son.

M2: I heard he was from Nazareth.

M4: Can anything good come from Nazareth?

OPENING LITANY | "Who is this?" (CONTINUED)

ALL: Who is this?

M4: I heard he knew John the Baptist.

M5: I heard he was related to John the Baptist.

M2: I heard he can heal people.

M3: Do you think he can heal me?

M4: Who is he?

M5: I heard he talks to gentiles.

M2: I heard he talks to children!

M3: And women!

M1: And tax collectors!

M4: Seriously, who is this?

M5: I heard he's the Son of David.

M2: I heard he's the Son of Man.

M3: I heard he's the one we've been waiting for.

M1: I heard he was born of a Virgin.

M2: I heard he was born in a stable.

ALL: Who is this?

M2: Why is he riding a donkey?

M3: How does he have so many followers?

M1: Do you think Caesar knows that a man from Nazareth has been welcomed with such a large parade?

ALL: Who is this?

M3: I don't know who he is, but I've heard he's gracious and kind.

M1: I heard he fed five thousand.

M5: I heard he survived the wilderness.

M4: I heard he helped the blind man see.

M3: Do you think he sees me?

M2: I heard he walked on water! Is that even possible?

M5: I heard he can save us.

M3: I heard he can save all of us.

M2: Who is this?

ALL: Who is this?

At this point, midrash readers can turn and be seated. We recommend having five stools or chairs in a row across the front of the chancel. When each reader offers their midrash, have them stand and move to the front of the chancel. They are invited to act out their role or move about to the degree that feels appropriate. When they are not reading, they can return to their seat.