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Philippians 2:5-11
EVERY KNEE WILL BOW BEFORE THE LORD

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Welcome to Holy Week. Today is the beginning of the busiest and most eventful week of the Church Year. It begins with Jesus triumphantly entering Jerusalem in humility riding on a donkey and being hailed as a King and the Messiah. Jesus would cleanse the Temple and throw the moneychangers out. He would teach in the Temple courts as his enemies plotted his death. He would teach about the last days and his Second Coming. The chief priests and teachers of the Law looked for a way to arrest and kill him. One of his own disciples, Judas Iscariot was willing to betray him for thirty pieces of silver. Jesus would celebrate the Passover meal with his disciples, instituting the Lord's Supper, given for his Church to observe until he returned as we receive his very body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. Things started speeding up. They went to the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus prayed. He was arrested. He was brought to trial before the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin. He was condemned to death. He was then brought before Pontius Pilate, Herod, and Pilate once again. He was sentenced to be crucified outside Jerusalem on a hill called Calvary. He suffered. He died. He was buried. And then...Easter, the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior.

Those are some of the highlights, but a very condensed version of what would happen. These are the most important events in the history of the world and that's no hyperbole. Yet most people are totally unaware and don't care. They will be excited by thoughts of spring, Opening Day for the Tigers, the NCAA basketball tournament, the Masters, and Easter brunches. But they have absolutely no interest in observing the death of Jesus or celebrating his victory over death on Easter Sunday. Give me bunnies and baskets and eggs and leave Jesus behind! That is how they view things. Things will change. The day is coming when everyone will confess who Jesus truly is, whether they want to or not. The Apostle Paul tells us that EVERY KNEE WILL BOW BEFORE THE LORD because Jesus became man and because Jesus is God.

We have seen many events filled with pomp and ceremony. We've seen Presidential inaugurations, state funerals, and royal weddings. 2000 years ago, a king entered Jerusalem, but it was a very strange thing. People lay down their cloaks and spread palm branches along the way. They shouted "Hosanna" and "Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord." But what kind of king was this? There was no marching army. There were no chariots with white horses. There were no trumpeters heralding his arrival. He came riding into the city on a donkey, a simple beast of burden. He wasn't dressed in fine clothing. He didn't appear to be wealthy. He was just an ordinary man, riding in humility, wasn't he?

Just a common man? Most people would say "yes!" The apostle Paul tells us that he was much more than that. "Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross." These words might sound strange and complex. They are. They describe a unique situation, one of a kind. It never happened before, and it will never happen again.

We speak of the humiliation of Christ. He humbled himself. When we think of humiliation or being humbled in our life, it is not necessarily something that we want to remember. It is striking out with the bases loaded. It is being

turned down for a date by someone who then laughs about it with all her friends. It's having all the other kids at school make fun of you. We all have humiliating experiences and they are not fun.

Jesus humbled himself. He did not always make full use of the power and the glory that he had as God. Jesus was God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, true God from eternity, almighty, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, eternal. But he became man. He took on human likeness. He became nothing. He gave up his existence in a manner equal to God.

He gave up his favorable relationship to the Law of God. While he was in heaven, he was not under the Law. It was his Law. When he became man, he was put under the Law. He would have to keep it perfectly since he would become our substitute. He gave up all his riches. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty, might become rich." Jesus had nothing. Think about his birth in a lowly stable in Bethlehem. He was always borrowing something: a boat to preach in, a donkey to ride upon, a room to celebrate the Passover, a tomb in which to be buried. He was totally and completely in debt, the greatest debt ever rung up, the payment for all our sins. Surely, he was poor.

He gave up his glory. He was the one to whom the angels bow their faces in reverence. Yet he became as Isaiah describes him, "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering." He became a servant. Not a ruler but a servant! That goes against our natural bent. We want to be President of the United States, not a person who shovels horse manure. Jesus said, "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many."

He still was God and he never ceased to be God. He still at times showed the power that he had as God as he performed miracles. He still at times showed his omniscience as he prophesied his death and resurrection. He still at times showed the glory that he had as God at his transfiguration. But he did not always show his full power and glory. Most of the time they were hidden. He looked just like any other human being. There was nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. It wasn't like he was a rock star or pro athlete or someone important!

He became man and he experienced things that he had never experienced before in all eternity. He grew tired and hungry and thirsty. He experienced physical pain and emotional grief. And then it got worse, much worse. He was betrayed by one of his disciples. Another cursed and swore that he never had heard of Jesus. He was vilified with false charges, innuendo, mocking, beating, being spit upon and stripped naked. And then he would be nailed to two pieces of wood by the very people he had come to save. Crucifixion was not only a very painful death and a very shameful death, a death reserved only for the worst of criminals. It was a death cursed by God. He was forsaken by his Father. He was punished with hell so that you and I might have heaven. He did all of it willingly. He said, "No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord."

And then it was over. Jesus said, "It is finished!" The payment for our sin had been made. Our sins are forgiven. Jesus had done his work. He did exactly what needed to be done! He did exactly what his Father had sent him to do. Now it was time for his reward. "Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." This is known as Jesus' exaltation. He once more took up the full power and glory that he had as God.

It would begin with his descent into hell. We confess that in the Apostles' Creed. People have misconceptions about that phrase. Jesus did not descend into hell to suffer. He suffered hell when he was on the cross, forsaken by his Father. Nor did Jesus descend into hell to give Satan and the people there another chance to believe in him. We have only one chance and that is during our lifetime here on earth, our time of grace. He descended into hell to proclaim his complete and utter triumph over sin, death, and Satan.

And then his next appearance was to the women and his disciples on that day called Easter. What a wonderful celebration we will have next Sunday! He rose from the grave. He destroyed the power of death forever. His victory is our victory. We too will rise, following our Lord's example.

He ascended into heaven where he sits at the right hand of God. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. He resumes the exalted position that he had previously. His poverty is once again exchanged for riches. His rejection is exchanged for acceptance. He who once was a servant is now Lord over all. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He rules all things in the interest of his church.

Jesus' glory in heaven is far above anything we can imagine. He has been given a name that is above every name. When we enter into eternal glory, we will never get tired of praising that name. We are also told that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow. Every being, whether in heaven or on earth or in hell will bow his knee to the King. At Jesus' return on Judgment Day, all will know that Jesus was exactly who he claimed to be. The angels and believers in Christ will do it joyfully. Satan, the demons, and unbelievers will do it reluctantly, but they will do it!

None of this should be shocking to us. Jesus had tried to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must go to Jerusalem where he would suffer many things at the hands of the chief priests and teachers of the Law. He would suffer, die, and rise again on the third day. They didn't get it. We go into Holy Week knowing exactly what will happen and what had to happen for our eternal future to be secured. Things will look very bleak on Friday as darkness covers the earth and the sun stops shining. Jesus submits to the ultimate shame and torture of the cross. But appearances can be deceiving. This was God's plan all along. We know what we celebrate next Sunday.

Every knee will bow before the Lord because Jesus became man. His love for us was so great that he would willingly become a servant who would suffer and die for us, even death on a cross. Every knee will bow before the Lord because Jesus is God. He will come again in glory to judge the world. This is our hope. This is our confidence. We acknowledge our King riding into Jerusalem in humility. We acknowledge our King returning with all his holy angels. We bow our knee to him, now and forever! Have a blessed Holy Week! AMEN.