Sermon:

Expectations can be dangerous things. Incompatible ones can ruin a marriage (I expect a cooked dinner every day when I return from work), parents can spoil the relationship with their children through unrealistic ones (You will become a doctor like me), Donald Trump may be unable to deliver the expectations of those who voted for him (Mexico will pay for the wall).

Jesus was not immune – expectations about the Messiah.

A coming Messiah was probably not on everyone’s mind, but many (not all) expected God to send one who would rid Israel of Romans through military means, like under the Maccabees. The best time to do this would be when folk gathered – Passover. NB. Jesus said he came to bring not peace but a sword (10.34), talked of the destruction of the Temple (24.1-2) - fighting talk! Even Peter used a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane to defend Jesus. Some think Judas only ‘betrayed’ Jesus to force Jesus to start the revolution.

Jesus did not deny being the Messiah (see Transfiguration 16.16) when called that by Peter. John the Baptist was a forerunner for a greater one (=Messiah?). But when it came down to it he showed a different type of Messiah, challenging people’s expectations.

[1] Donkey-riding

Jesus deliberately rode on a donkey. Not only was this not a warhorse, but see Zech 9.9 (**Look, your king is coming to you! He comes triumphant and victorious, but humble and riding on a donkey**). In humility and peace he rode. Maybe it is not too surprising that a crowd who cried “Hosanna” turned on him and shouted “Crucify” when he did not fulfil their expectations.

[2] Crown of thorns

After his trial and his sentence of death Jesus was given the trappings of kingship (scarlet robe, crown of thorns, a stick-sceptre) and mocked (27.28-29). This was to belittle him, and was continued by passers-by, religious leaders and crucified bandits at the cross (27.39-42, 44).

They did not realise that Jesus embraced both of these as true signifiers of Messiahship.

What are our expectations of God? What do you expect God will do about your situation? Do you expect the equivalent of an impressive leader on a warhorse, sorting out all the problems? Or can you perceive God in the peaceful submission to the law of love wherever it leads? Even to a cross of thorns? As Christians we celebrate a humble king as it shows us God’s true attitude towards us. For this is the God we adore.