



# ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

Palm Sunday, being the Sixth Sunday in Lent, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2013

✠ **In the Name of the Father and of the Son  
and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN** ✠

The people involved in our Lord's trial and execution believed they were acting to protect their families, their communities and their nation. All of them thought his death would make the world a safer place to live in.

At time of the crucifixion, Rome was the earth's sole superpower and its empire covered much of the known world. The rulers of the lands on its periphery took care to avoid incurring Rome's anger – a sensible policy when confronted with a military juggernaut that could invade your country, subdue it, and occupy your capital city in a matter of weeks.

Rome, however, was deeply concerned at the prospect of domestic unrest and what we, today, would call terrorist activities. The empire's energy source, like ours, was carbon-based. But it was neither coal nor oil. Rome's energy came from men's backs.

Rome ran on slave labor. Slaves performed all the functions for which we use gasoline engines and electric motors. In Rome, even folks near the bottom of

the socio-economic ladder owned a couple of slaves. This, however, meant Rome lived in constant fear of slave uprisings. A revolt led by Spartacus the Gladiator, some fifty years earlier, claimed many Roman lives before it was put down, with great brutality, by Julius Caesar's banker, Marcus Crassus. The law prescribed the hideous punishment of crucifixion to discourage slaves from running away or otherwise rebelling.

Crucifixion was also the penalty for acts of terrorism. Political unrest was endemic in parts of the empire and frequently this manifest itself in uprisings that would today be called terrorism or guerrilla warfare.

At the time of Jesus' birth, for example, the Province of Syria, of which the Holy Land was then part, had been put under martial law during a terrorist campaign. Memories of it had been so deeply etched on people's minds that 50 years later they still talked with horror about the shrewd and ruthless military governor of the time, Quirinius (Cyrenius as Greek-speakers called him).

Among the most virulent Middle Eastern terrorists were the Zealots – Jewish fundamentalists whose agenda was to terrorize Rome into evacuating the Holy Land. There were several Zealot groups, but most were preparing for awaiting the coming of the Messiah.

The Zealots frequently attacked lone civilian travelers as well as Roman military patrols. The stretch of road between Jerusalem and Jericho was such a favorite ambush site it was dubbed the Valley of the Shadow of Death. As the Parable of the good Samaritan implies, it was safe to travel only with a strong military escort.

At the time of Jesus' arrest, the Roman secret police had scored a major coup in the War on Terrorism. They had arrested a "most wanted" Zealot named Barabbas. Jesus had no terrorist record, but two of his close associates were known terrorists: Simon, nicknamed the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot or Sicari – Knife Fighter.

Jewish terrorism was particularly frightening for the Romans. The Jews were the largest minority in the empire and there were Jewish communities in most of major cities, including 150,000 in Rome itself. If the Zealots gained a foothold in the overseas communities they would present an incalculable threat to Rome.

Jerusalem that Palm Sunday was a powder keg. It was packed with

foreigners who had come to the holy city to celebrate Passover. They had seen Jesus hailed at the Messiah. Insurrection was on everybody's lips.

Moderate Jewish political leaders – such as Caiaphas and his father-in-law, Annas – were desperate to prevent such a catastrophe. They knew Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, would ruthlessly crush any up-rising.

In a mood of desperation, St. John tells us, the Jewish leaders met secretly to consider their options. "What shall we do?" they asked, "If we leave him alone, everybody will believe in him, and the Romans will come and kick us out of our jobs and destroy the nation."

It was Caiaphas who came up with a practical, political and entirely unscrupulous, solution to the problem: sacrifice an innocent man to save the lives of many. "It is expedient for us," he said, "that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not."

Thus, writes St. John, Caiaphas assumed the mantle of a prophet and unwittingly foretold that Jesus should die to save not just the Jewish people, but "all of the children of God scattered abroad."  
*AMEN.*

***To the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power now and forever. AMEN***