



*Show me your  
ways O Lord*

Advent Bible Studies  
2021



# Introduction

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Psalms is the largest book in our Bible and it has played a significant part both in private devotions and in the communal worship of the church throughout history. Most monastic orders have long required their members to recite the Psalms daily, and to know them by heart. For many Protestant churches, psalms have been a major - and sometimes the only - form of communal singing. Contemporary church lectionaries are arranged to ensure that the Psalms are read in their entirety over a period of time.

Yet today a lot of Christians find Psalms a difficult book to engage with. Most of us choose to open it only to read a favourite psalm or two, such as Ps 23 and Ps 100, and the remainder of the collection is a closed book (both literally and metaphorically!). Otherwise, we encounter psalms only when we hear them read in church. Some of the sentiments they express can appear strange, old-fashioned, obscure, and even, in some cases, thoroughly objectionable. As a consequence, they may seem to be irrelevant and of doubtful spiritual value to the modern believer.

This is not entirely surprising: Psalms is a book comprising a large number of works written long ago in a land and culture very alien to ours. Although they have traditionally been called the 'Psalms of David', they were in fact written by many different people, over the course of centuries. They reflect a range of styles and focus on various themes. What they have in common is that the psalmists write of their hopes, fears, questions, doubts, and gratitude; they reflect, argue, complain, confess, and so on. They do this, for the most part, so well that in many psalms we feel the writer is speaking for us.

Probably all of the psalms, despite their very different styles and topics, were created as public art to be performed. Even those which express highly personal, intimate emotions (such as Pss 23 and 51) were almost certainly not private works known only to the author. They would have been read aloud so the listeners could feel that they, too, were participating in the conversation with God. The psalms thus have an important role to play for us all in our developing relationship with God, as individuals and as a community of faith.

As you read the daily psalms and notes, imagine yourself joining in the psalmist's conversation with God. Be aware of differences between the psalms: the focus each one has; the mood of the writer; particular images that strike you. At the same time, look for common themes, images, and expressions across the different psalms.

Advent is a joyful season; may these readings in Psalms help you to appreciate it more deeply and draw you closer to Our Lord.

*The Rev'd Dr Mark Garner*

## The Rev'd Robyn Shackell

Robyn is an honorary assistant priest in the Parish of Warrnambool and Chair of the Ministry Development Committee of the diocese. Her former working life included Industrial Chaplaincy, Psychology, Christian Education and teaching (Primary and Tertiary). She is married to Denis and enjoys extended family activities, gardening, reading and sewing.

## Sunday 28 November

### Psalm 25.1-10

In you, O Lord my God, have I put my hope:  
in you have I trusted, let me not be ashamed,  
nor let my enemies triumph over me.  
Let none who wait for you be put to shame:  
but let those that break faith  
be confounded and gain nothing.  
Show me your ways O Lord:  
and teach me your paths.  
Lead me in the ways of your truth, and teach me:  
for you are the God of my salvation.  
In you have I hoped all the day long:  
because of your goodness, O Lord.  
Call to mind your compassion and your loving kindness:  
for they are from of old.  
Remember not the sins of my youth,  
nor my transgressions:  
but according to your mercy think on me.

Good and upright is the Lord:

therefore he will direct sinners in the way.

The meek he will guide in the path of justice:

and teach the humble his ways.

All the paths of the Lord are faithful and true:

for those who keep his covenant and his commandments.

Today is the first Sunday of Advent, that special time when we look forward to the coming of Jesus, both his coming as a baby at Bethlehem, and to the time when Jesus comes again in glory to our earth. Today's lectionary readings look forward to his coming again, and our psalm echoes these sentiments. It encourages us who wait, to live lives that do not cause us shame. The writer asks the "God of our salvation" to teach us and lead us as we wait.

The author also looks back over his life, remembering the times when he has not lived the way he wished, and asks God's forgiveness. This psalm encourages us to look both forward and backward, and to follow the Lord's way - great advice as we begin our Advent journey.

**Some recordings to listen to:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1eKkl4EeQM>  
Graham Kendrick and Matt Redman (To you O Lord)  
Contemporary Christian Praise Song
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjVoPBuBRj8>  
Psalm Project - Psalm 25

**Questions**

1. The writer asks God to forget his past sins. What do I need to ask God?
2. The writer says "In you I have hoped all day long." How might I do this during Advent?

3. Which word or phrase stands out for you in this psalm?  
Why? What is God calling you to do?

## Prayer

O Lord, help us to know your ways and to walk in them as we begin our Advent journey.

## Monday 29 November

### Psalm 122

I was glad when they said to me:  
'Let us go into the house of the Lord.'  
And now our feet are standing:  
within your gates O Jerusalem;  
Jerusalem which is built as a city:  
where pilgrims gather in unity.  
There the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord:  
as he commanded Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of the Lord.  
There are set thrones of judgement:  
the thrones of the house of David.  
O pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  
may those who love you prosper.  
Peace be within your walls:  
and prosperity in your palaces.  
For the sake of my kindred and companions:  
I will pray that peace be with you.  
For the sake of the house of the Lord our God:  
I will seek for your good.

This song of prayer and praise for Jerusalem was probably used for Jewish pilgrims as they went up to Jerusalem to worship God, and so although it begins as a personal statement – "I was glad..." it also reflects communal activity. This can remind us that our Advent

journey is both a personal one, and a journey that we share with our community of faith. We also can be glad that we can come together in God's house to worship together and encourage each other. In this year of pandemic and lockdowns we can be especially thankful to God for the opportunities to worship together.

This psalm also invited worshippers to pray for peace. Perhaps it can remind us to pray for peace in the Holy Land, in our own land and within our local and church communities.

### **Some recordings to listen to:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=trYd3jBy9uM>  
King's College Cambridge
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKUnTt1\\_l6g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKUnTt1_l6g)  
Contemporary Christian Song: House of the Lord

### **Questions**

1. Do I look forward to going to church with gladness? Why or why not?
2. How do I maintain a healthy balance between my personal faith journey and that of my church community?
3. Do my prayers reflect the sentiments of this Psalm?

### **Prayer**

Thank you, God for the freedom to regularly come together to worship you. Thank you for beautiful church buildings, for wise church leaders and for the church communities to which we belong. May we never lose the joy of worshipping you.



## Tuesday 30 November

### Psalm 72.1-7

Give the king your judgement, O God:  
And your righteousness to the son of a king,  
That he may judge your people rightly:  
And the poor in the land with equity.  
Let the mountains be laden with peace  
because of his righteousness:  
and the hills also with prosperity for his people.  
May he give justice to the poor among the people:  
and rescue the children of the needy,  
and crush the oppressor.  
May he live while the sun endures:  
and while the moon gives light,  
throughout all generations.  
May he come down like rain upon the new-mown fields:  
and as showers that water the earth.  
In his time shall righteousness flourish:  
and the abundance of peace, till the moon shall be no more.

This prayer for guidance and support for the king might seem anachronistic to our modern ears, but perhaps it might contain some insights for us. The author is praying for a leader who works for justice, who supports the poor and needy, and who brings peace to his people. This psalm challenges us to be people who regularly pray for our leaders, rather than complain about their shortcomings.

These verses are also used on Epiphany, suggesting that we can apply them to our king, Jesus, the one who comes bringing justice and peace.

## Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vu3YQNxiW8Q>  
Hymn: Hail to the Lord's Anointed
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1dSy2Togxg>  
David Suchet reads Psalm 72

## Questions

1. How often do I pray for national and world leaders, especially those I find hard to respect?
2. How do I and my parish care for the poor and needy?
3. What does it mean to have Jesus as our king?

## Prayer

Spirit of justice and truth, grant to our governments and all who serve in public life, wisdom and skill, imagination and energy; protect them from corruption and the temptation of self-serving. Help us to commit ourselves to the common good that our land may be a secure home for all its peoples, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

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## Wednesday 1 December

### Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd:  
therefore can I lack nothing  
He will make me lie down in green pastures:  
and lead me beside still waters.  
He will refresh my soul:  
and guide me in right pathways for his names sake.  
Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil:  
for you are with me and your rod and staff comfort me.  
You spread a table before me  
in the face of those who trouble me:  
you have anointed my head with oil,  
and my cup shall be full.  
Surely your goodness and loving kindness  
will follow me all the days of my life:  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

The bible often uses images of a shepherd to teach us about God's love and care. The dry, rugged and dangerous countryside of Palestine meant that sheep needed the special care of a shepherd, who would lead the flock to places where grass could be found, and who would protect the animals from wild animals.

Psalm 23 is probably the most famous of all the Psalms, for good reason, as it uses the image of God as a loving and caring shepherd. This psalm is associated with David, who, may or may not have been its author. David as a young man, was responsible for caring for his father's sheep, and who had had to fight off lions and bears to protect his flock, (see 1 Samuel 17:14) so he knew exactly what the role of a shepherd was, so it does reflect his experience. This song reminds us of Jesus, our Good Shepherd, (see John 10) who gave his life for us, his sheep. Psalm 23 is an encouraging psalm, reminding

us that God leads us to good places, God provides for us and God comforts us and protects us in times of difficulty and trouble.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g34-nB3oym4>  
Paul Kelly: Meet me in the middle of the air
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAZN1oVir5A>  
Vicar of Dibley theme

### Questions

1. The image of a shepherd is not as relevant to us today as it was in Bible times. What image could be used instead? You might like to write a modern version of this psalm.
2. What are some "right pathways" that God has led you into recently?
3. What are God's "rod and staff" for you?
4. Who are those "who trouble" you? Where is God in this trouble?

### Prayer

O God, our Good Shepherd, thank you for your promises to guide us and comfort us. May we truly follow you all the days of our lives.

## Thursday 2 December

### Psalm 118.19-25

Open me the gates of righteousness:  
and I will enter and give thanks to the Lord.

This is the gate of the Lord:  
the righteous shall enter it.

I will praise you, for you answered me:  
and have become my salvation.

The stone that the builder rejected:  
has become the head of the corner.

This is the Lord's doing:  
and it is marvellous in our eyes.

This is the day that the Lord has made:  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.

O Lord, save us, we pray:  
O Lord, send us prosperity.

This Psalm, like yesterday's, also reminds us of Jesus. Jesus is that "stone" rejected by builders that has become the cornerstone – the foundation of our lives. While this is quite a contrast to the Shepherd image used yesterday, it also reminds us of God's care for us. The writer notes that salvation comes from God and challenges us to live lives of righteousness - lives modelled on our cornerstone.

Those of us who use the daily Prayer book Morning Prayer service will be very familiar with v24 "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." These are the words that begin Sunday's service. Reading them today, Thursday, reminds us that everyday is a day which God makes for us, a day to bring us joy.

## Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bZ5CtayvRT4>  
Francesca La Rosa
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZE0Zak8KBMM>  
Choir of Worcester Cathedral (trad)

## Questions

1. The psalmist speaks of the Lord taking something rejected and making it marvellous. Which aspect of the Lord's action in your life is "marvellous"?
2. What have you got to rejoice in today?
3. Look at Ephesians 2. 17-21 and think about what it means for Jesus to be the cornerstone of your life.

## Prayer

Loving God, may my life be built on the solid foundation of Jesus, my cornerstone. May I recognise your actions in my life today and every day.

## Friday 3 December

### Psalm 27.9-17

O Lord, hear my voice when I cry:

have mercy upon me and answer me.

My heart has said of you, "Seek his face":

your face Lord, will I seek.

Do not hide your face from me:

or thrust your servant aside in your displeasure;

For you have been my helper:

do not cast me away or forsake me, O God of my salvation.

Though my father and mother forsake me:

the Lord will take me up.

Teach me your ways, O Lord;  
and lead me in an even path, for they lie in wait for me.  
Do not give me over to the will of my enemies:  
for false witnesses have risen against me,  
and those who breathe out violence.  
But I believe that I shall surely see  
the goodness of the Lord:  
in the land of the living.  
O wait for the Lord;  
stand firm and he will strengthen your heart:  
and wait, I say, for the Lord.

We often think of Advent as a time of waiting. Today's psalm takes up the theme of waiting for the Lord. In this difficult pandemic year many of us will have experienced feelings like our psalmist today. He feels that sometimes the Lord is "hiding his face." He feels let down by family and lied about by "enemies." He asks God to hear him, have mercy on him and answer him. In spite of the difficulties he is facing, the writer's final conclusion is optimistic. He believes that he will see the goodness of the Lord and he encourages us to also wait for the Lord and know that he will strengthen us. It is encouraging for us to remember that even when we feel abandoned by God, God is always walking beside us, strengthening us.

**Some recordings to listen to:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLLGwt-wZbl>  
Jonathon Ogden (Contemporary)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BJhqi71MJE>  
Choir of Salisbury Cathedral (Trad)

## Questions

1. When have you felt abandoned? What helped you?
2. Where have you seen the goodness of the Lord during the last year?
3. How do you “wait for the Lord?”

## Prayer

Thank you, Lord that you do hear us even when we feel lost and unable to pray. Help us to see the “goodness of the Lord” in our tough times as well as our good times.

## Saturday 4 December

### Psalm 147.1-6

O praise the Lord,  
for it is good to sing praises to our God:  
and to praise him is joyful and right.  
The Lord is rebuilding Jerusalem:  
he is gathering together the scattered outcasts of Israel.  
He heals the broken in spirit:  
and binds up their wounds.  
He counts the number of the stars:  
and calls them all by name.  
Great is our Lord, and great is his power:  
there is no measuring his understanding.  
The Lord restores the humble:  
but he brings down the wicked to the dust.

This is a psalm of hope. It is set in the time after the exile, that time when the temple was destroyed and God’s people were taken from their land into exile in Babylon. During that time when many people would have lost hope, but now they were experiencing the



rebuilding of their beloved Jerusalem, and witnessing the return of the scattered people to their homeland.

Many of us have experienced times of struggle and feelings of hopelessness during the pandemic, so this psalm can offer us hope. God heals the “broken in spirit, and binds up their wounds.” Isn’t that a hopeful image – the one who knows the names of all the stars comes as a gentle nurse to care for us.

### **Some recordings to listen to:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LB2efUp33B0>  
Acapella from Scottish Psalter
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8bn2sM97A8>  
Stuart Townend (contemporary)

### **Questions**

1. What are images of hope for you?
2. Looking back over the last year, how has God nursed you?
3. The psalmist calls us to sing God’s praises. How do you respond to God’s loving care?

### **Prayer**

Loving God, Thank you for your care during this difficult year. Thank you for those who have been your “nurses” for me. Help me to be there for others, and to be one who sings your praises.

## Questions for the week

These questions can be used by individuals or can be used to stimulate a weekly group discussion from those using the notes daily.

1. In this time of Advent, what are you looking forward to? Why?
2. How has God come to you this week?
3. After this pandemic year, what are the hopeful messages that you have discovered from this week's Palms?
4. Which has been your favourite Psalm or image from a psalm? How did that speak to you?

## Keith Romanis

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## Sunday 5 December

### Song of Zechariah (the father of John the Baptist)

Blessed be the Lord the God of Israel,  
who has come to his people and set them free.  
He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,  
born of the house of his servant David.  
Through his holy prophets God promised of old  
to save us from our enemies,

    from the hands of all that hate us,  
To show mercy to our ancestors,  
and to remember his holy covenant.  
This was the oath God swore to our father Abraham:  
to set us free from the hands of our enemies,  
Free to worship him without fear,  
holy and righteous in his sight  
    all the days of our life.

And you, child, shall be called the prophet of the Most High,  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way,  
To give his people knowledge of salvation  
by the forgiveness of all their sins.  
In the tender compassion of our God  
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death,  
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

*(Luke 1:68-79)*

The song of Zechariah is the second of the great songs of praise that Luke shares in the opening Chapter of the Gospel, in Mary's Song (the Magnificat) earlier in the chapter a woman gives thanks to God for her pregnancy and what that means for the world. Here, a man gives thanks to God for the birth of his child and what that means for the world. Zechariah did not believe that this child would come and now he can shout his joy to all who will listen.

This song of course is laden with biblical allusions and prophecy. Isaiah 42:5-7 is quoted and the messianic prophecy that John will point toward is very clearly proclaimed. But at its heart it is a song of thanksgiving and hope. A hope towards the Kingdom of God where "the dawn from on high will break upon us".

You might like to find a version of this song to listen to, these canticles and psalms were meant to be sung aloud and listened to:

- <https://music.ordinarytimemusic.com/track/zechariahs-song> (acoustic version by band: Ordinary Time)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kwavglPhNGA> (J. Beaugard and K. Taylor)

## Questions

1. When you listened to or read the song, what emotions did you experience?
2. Why do you think Luke begins his "orderly account of the events" with two songs?
3. What might he be trying to make us think or feel?
4. When has God given light to you when you might have been sitting in darkness?

5. What hope do you have for the coming Kingdom of God?

### Prayer

Loving God, we pray the prayer of Zechariah, giving thanks for the mighty saviour raised up for us; for the many good things that you have provided. We pray for those who still walk in darkness and despair and ask for your loving light to open their eyes and brighten their path. We pray for the communities around the world who wait in this time of Advent hopeful for the coming of the Kingdom of God. Strengthen our hearts and minds so that we might play our part to walk the path of peace. In the name of Christ. AMEN

## Monday 6 December

### Psalm 85:8-13

Let me hear what God the LORD will speak,  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.  
Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him,  
that his glory may dwell in our land.  
Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.  
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.  
The LORD will give what is good,  
and our land will yield its increase.  
Righteousness will go before him,  
and will make a path for his steps.

Sometimes when we listen to poetry the meaning is made known more easily than when we read them. Listening to one of the following tracks can cut right to the heart of what the psalmist is trying to say here: that the God who in awesome might made the universe wants to know us, wants to include us.

## Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beXiHAptuE>  
(Francesca La Rosa on keyboard)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wcMTO8Dsvl>  
(Chris Brunelle)

The Psalmist is describing the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom that Zechariah has longed for and that John the Baptist will prepare the path for. The coming Messiah will begin the process of this coming together of heaven and earth. A process that we can have a part in; faithfulness and righteousness is within us to live out. What can we do to work with God in shaping the Kingdom, on earth as it is in heaven?

## Questions

1. How does God speak to you? How can you set yourself up to “hear what God the LORD will speak”?
2. What might God’s peace look like as opposed to human peace?
3. In a world of inequality, of haves and have-nots, how might we work to bring righteousness to the world?
4. What is your hope for the Kingdom of God and what are simple ways of bringing it closer?

## Prayer

God of Peace, give us ears to hear your words, give us minds and hands that bring about your will and your Kingdom. We pray for equality and justice in your world. Give us the faith to trust in you, to love faithfully, to love our neighbours as you have taught us. Bring about your Kingdom Lord, and lead us towards your love so that your glory fills the whole world. AMEN

## Tuesday 7 December

### Psalm 96:7-13

Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
bring an offering, and come into his courts.

Worship the LORD in holy splendour;  
tremble before him, all the earth.

Say among the nations, 'The LORD is king!

The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.

He will judge the peoples with equity.'

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;

let the sea roar, and all that fills it;

let the field exult, and everything in it.

Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy

before the LORD; for he is coming,

for he is coming to judge the earth.

He will judge the world with righteousness,

and the peoples with his truth.

We often say or sing the psalms in church on Sunday by alternating verses (one group says one line, and another the next) because many of them are written as conversations between God and God's people. The reading starts this psalm about half-way through, but this makes sense because we join in when it's our turn! This psalm of praise begins with the instruction "let all the world in every corner sing!" calling for the necessary praise by all Creation for the God of order and truth; then we are called upon to do our part: the NRSVA translation says "Ascribe", The Voice says: "Give all credit". We are directed to do what the psalmist believes is clear to everyone, to give praise to the divine creator. Then the people of Israel are told to do more, to proclaim this knowledge to all people, to spread the message to the entire world! Why? Because everything is going to

be set right by the very power who made it in the first place – the injustices of the world will be swept away by a righteous and loving God.

The coming Kingdom of God, that Christians perceive as coming through the reign of Jesus is already taking early shape here in this psalm written many centuries before Jesus was born. We praise a God of order and justice, but also begin to think about what that might mean in our lives – what does the God of order and justice require of us?

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lfkiUsk-lnM>  
(St Paul's Cathedral)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FI5FQh39iVk>  
(Read by David Suchet)

### Questions

1. What part of Creation draws you towards spontaneous praise?
2. We often think of nature as "wild" and human society as "ordered", what is wild and disordered in our human society? What should we be doing about it?
3. What is disordered in nature and what should we be doing about it?
4. What do you want to give God credit for?

### Prayer

Loving God we join with all Creation in praising you. We give you thanks for the order and peace you bring into our lives. Give us the strength to turn our song into active compassion. Support us to act for peace and order in our world as we await your coming Kingdom.  
AMEN



## Wednesday 8 December

### Psalm 103:1-5

Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul,  
and do not forget all his benefits—  
who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,  
who redeems your life from the Pit,  
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,  
who satisfies you with good as long as you live  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

This Psalm is pure praise – it is an outpouring of recognition of the wonderful nature of the Almighty. In our prayers Anglicans are sometimes not very good at gratitude, thanking God for our many gifts and often the Psalms teach us to bring our concerns and sorrows to God in petition and lament. So sometimes, we can miss out in standing back and expressing the awe that we feel in God's presence – in our own lives, in the humanity of those around us and in God's life-giving Creation. This Psalm reminds to praise the Lord, the King of Heaven!

### Some recordings to listen to:

These two songs are songs of praise drawn from Psalm 103, one traditional and one from the modern Church, both sing out to God in joy:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n\\_BPn5BxH4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n_BPn5BxH4)  
(Praise my soul the King of Heaven Hymn)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXDGE\\_IRI0E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXDGE_IRI0E)  
(10,000 Reasons Matt Redman)

## Questions

1. Where is a place that reminds you of the awesome power of God?
2. What is your favourite song of praise? (It might be a hymn, but it might be another song that lifts your heart to the Lord.)
3. One of the joys of Advent is that it directs our hearts and minds to the coming Saviour, what is it about God's work in your life that brings you joy?

## Prayer

Almighty God, we sing your praises remembering your great gifts and mercies. Astounded by the vast span of your Creation and delighted by its intricate details, we are in awe of all that you have made. Guide us beyond gratitude into praise, teach us to see with eyes that are open to new possibilities, alight to the magnitude of your love and grace. God who made us, loves us and guides us help us to remember you as we go about our day; through Jesus Christ our Lord. We pray these things in Jesus' name. AMEN

## Thursday 9 December

### Psalm 145:8-13

The LORD is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
The LORD is good to all,  
and his compassion is over all that he has made.  
All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD,  
and all your faithful shall bless you.  
They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom,  
and tell of your power,  
to make known to all people your mighty deeds,

and the glorious splendour of your kingdom.  
Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,  
and your dominion endures throughout all generations.  
The LORD is faithful in all his words,  
and gracious in all his deeds.

This Psalm reflects on the relationship between God and “all people”. Looking back on human history as Christians we can see that the universal message of God’s Kingdom is on display here, freely available to all God’s children. God is trustworthy and loving, full of a compassion that endures forever. We, all people, as well as all the created order, are called into relationship with this loving God. And we can rely on God’s promises, this is not a vengeful God, but one that is “slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” this formula for God is drawn from Exodus 34:46 and is repeated in the book of Joel and elsewhere in the Psalms. This is the God who we can rely on, whose example of love we need to emulate, we are called into relationship with God and to bring about God’s Kingdom.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vctoOOKu13U>  
(Francesca La Rosa)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mq\\_gsvnoUoQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mq_gsvnoUoQ)  
(Read by David Suchet)

### Questions

1. How has God been good to you?
2. This psalm moves from praise to gratitude, what are you grateful for today?
3. What might it mean if all humans were to concentrate on emulating God in being faithful in our words and gracious in our deeds?

4. What change might I need to make to my words and deeds?

### Prayer

Loving God, we give thanks for our material blessings remembering those around the world who are in desperate need. We give you thanks for your gifts of love and compassion, both in our relationship with you where you see us and love us, but also in our relationships with others. Grant us discernment and courage to live lives full of faith and grace. Faithful God, hear our prayer. AMEN

### Friday 10 December

#### Psalm 1

Happy are those  
    who do not follow the advice of the wicked,  
or take the path that sinners tread,  
    or sit in the seat of scoffers;  
but their delight is in the law of the LORD,  
    and on his law they meditate day and night.  
They are like trees  
    planted by streams of water,  
which yield their fruit in its season,  
    and their leaves do not wither.  
In all that they do, they prosper.  
The wicked are not so,  
    but are like chaff that the wind drives away.  
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgement,  
    nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
for the LORD watches over the way of the righteous,  
    but the way of the wicked will perish.

## Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYhQATf8HDw>  
(Psalm 1 - Sons of Korah)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLEFeeYy5NE>  
(Read by David Suchet)

Psalm 1 gives us a taste of all the different kinds of psalms that will follow in the collection of poems of praise, gratitude, petition and lament. We are meant to hear these words and be transformed by them! There is a stark contrast offered in this first Psalm between those who turn to God for their wisdom and comfort rather than the ways of the world. So at this point, with Advent (and this reading guide) well underway, it is a great time to reflect on how reading the Psalms might transform us. The questions for today's reading developed by Project Zero at Harvard and are a teaching tool used in schools, to get students thinking. It can help to write down your answers to each question in turn to aid your reflection.

## Questions

1. What have you *connected* with in your reading of the Psalms, what important messages have you been reminded of?
2. What new ideas have you encountered that have *extended* your knowledge or understanding?
3. What are you *challenged* by in these readings? What questions, wonderings and puzzles do you now have?

## Prayer

Gracious God we give you thanks for the wisdom of the Psalms. Guide us to walk in your ways and delight in your laws. Help us to live lives directed by your faithfulness, courage, grace and compassion. Loving God we pray for everyone in your world, for those who walk the Christian path and to all people that they might hear of your mercy and tell of your glory. AMEN

## Saturday 11 December

### Psalm 80:14-19

Turn again, O God of hosts;  
    look down from heaven, and see;  
have regard for this vine,  
    the stock that your right hand planted.  
They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;  
    may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.  
But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,  
    the one whom you made strong for yourself.  
Then we will never turn back from you;  
    give us life, and we will call on your name.  
Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;  
    let your face shine, that we may be saved.

For the first time in this week the lectionary gives us a lament, and in these times of global concern over COVID-19 and all the disruption that the virus has brought, it seems incredibly contemporary! The Psalmist of the chosen people of God is using the image of the vineyard for the Jewish people. Why God, they ask, did you bother to plant us if this was going to be our life, burnt with fire and cut down! In our modern setting, we work hard, we are good people, yet the virus has ravaged our lives! We are not given God's response in these verses, the point of lament is not always to receive a solution. God knows that we sorrow, that there is pain and suffering in our

existence. As Christians we know that the coming Kingdom of God will wipe away every tear, but also that part of God's gift to us is to hold space for us while we grieve, while we cry out in our suffering. This psalm doesn't provide simple answers but it does point to a God who made us, knows us and is steadfast, even when things seem so unbearably difficult.

### **Some beautiful (and soul-wrenching) recordings to listen to:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOFGZLUVbEI>  
The Vineyard of the Lord (Lord, Make Us Turn to You) Kevin Keil
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umMGyTM6NK8>  
(Choral from the Scottish Psalter)

### **Questions**

1. When have you had someone listen to you in your grief or frustration? Are there any advantages in being listened to without having to hear solutions?
2. When have you "held space" for someone, made room just to sit and listen to them. Did you recognize it as a holy act?
3. What in your life needs to be offered up to God in sorrow?
4. What signs do you see even in despair of a God who made you, knows you and is steadfast?

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, we come before you with praise and gratitude, but also in our sorrow. Hold us, know us, comfort us. Give us strength to endure and to be people of hope. Lord we don't always know your ways, help us to lean into you for comfort and to be ready to be leant on by others in our turn. Bless your people Lord, hold us and comfort us, now and forever. In Jesus' name we pray. AMEN

## Questions for the Week:

These questions can be used by individuals or can be used to stimulate a weekly group discussion from those using the notes daily.

1. What secular songs bring you joy? Or allow you to express sorrow?
2. What is one word that you would use to describe the Kingdom of God? What does that word mean to you?
3. If you listened to any of the recordings for this week: Which helped you best understand the psalmist's message?
4. What is one theme from the collected Psalms of this week that you identified?
5. How does that theme relate to our preparation for the coming of Christ that we celebrate at Christmas?



# Week Three

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## The Rev'd Canon David Oulton

Growing up on a wheat / sheep farm in the Wimmera Fr. David has always enjoyed the rural life and the diocese of Ballarat. Between secondary school and theological college he enjoyed taking tours round Seppelts Great Western. He married Jeanine in 1983, was ordained deacon in 1984 and priested in 1985. Jeanine and Fr. David have a daughter Stephanie who prays for them from that distant shore. Their son Michael is an industrial photographer in Melbourne and Jacky their daughter is an 'App maker' in New York. They are currently enjoying the lush and pleasant green pastures of the parish of Hamilton.

## Sunday 12 December

This reading is not included in the book of Psalms, but is a song from Isaiah, and is used in our prayer book as a canticle (ie a hymn or chant, typically with a biblical text, forming a regular part of a church service.)

'Behold, God is my salvation:  
I will trust and will not be afraid;  
'For the Lord God is my strength and my song:  
and has become my salvation.'  
With joy you will draw water:  
from the wells of salvation.  
On that day you will say:  
'Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name;  
'Make known his deeds among the nations:  
proclaim that his name is exalted.  
'Sing God's praises, who has triumphed gloriously:  
let this be known in all the world.

'Shout and sing for joy, you that dwell in Zion:  
for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

On a first reading the canticle seems to be celebratory. However, the canticle is actually looking forward to a future time when all will be champagne, lightning and rainbows. "On that day you will say..." For the author, 'That day' is not today. It is not here yet.

Further, when 'The day' arrives there will be work to do. Give thanks, make his deeds known, proclaim, sing, .... Just as the author is looking forward to the day of the Lord, so we, in this Advent time, are looking forward to the Lord's coming, both as a babe at Christmas, and to our Lord's second coming.

The author knew fear, but they also knew how it could be conquered. 'I will trust and will not be afraid'. The author wants to trust, needs to trust, knows that they should trust ... but... like all of us needs to be called back to the adventure where we trust and ... jump. Then 'That day' really will have dawned.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTzj5FJMUMI>  
Song of Isaiah (Contemporary) Chandler Moore
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9N-eyM407w>  
The Message Translation (read)

### Questions

1. "I will trust and not be afraid." What is your fear? What do you do with that fear?
2. Why is it so hard to trust?
3. What is the work that Isaiah asks us to do and what might that look like in our community at the end of 2021?
4. What are you looking forward to?

## Prayer

Holy Father, when we are fear-full, give us trust. When we are arid and parched, give us water from the wells of salvation. When we are timorous, beckon us to jump into your loving arms that your day may dawn and your triumph may be known in all the world. Amen.

## Monday 13 December

### Psalm 25.3-9

Show me your ways, O Lord:

and teach me your paths.

Lead me in the ways of your truth, and teach me:

for you are the God of my salvation.

In you have I hoped all the day long:

because of your goodness, O Lord.

Call to mind your compassion and your loving-kindness: for they are from of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions:

but according to your mercy think on me.

Good and upright is the Lord:

therefore will he direct sinners in the way.

The meek he will guide in the path of justice:

and teach the humble his ways.

In just 6 (six) short verses, the word 'Teach' appears 3 (three) times.

Clearly there is some learning to do as we approach the crib. There is an academic learning where we can repeat things by rote, but I don't think that is what the psalmist is referring to.

'Teach me your paths' is to learn a pattern of life formed by helpful habits. This is harder than academic learning for we slip and slide away from our well intentioned ideals to comfortable, familiar patterns of living. This 'learning' is an ongoing, life long struggle and the author asks to be led in 'the ways of truth' which cannot only be

hard to live, but also confront us with the person we are called to be. However the psalmist also reminds us that the Lord will be our "guide" and "teacher".

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjVoPBuBRj8>  
Psalm Project
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=me1734lPhDE>  
Psalm 25 read by David Suchet

### Questions

1. Describe the person or people who taught you the most.
2. What lessons did they teach you and how?
3. 'Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions'  
What would you say to / teach your thirteen year old self?

And/Or

What would you say to / teach your 'pre COVID' self?

### Prayer

Master Teacher, when all seems confused, bewildering and dark, send the shepherds to guide us gently in the path to the manger. There may the newness of life and the humility of the unexpected, help us to be born again in your image, even as we join in the squawking cries of the Christ child, Jesus our Lord. Amen.

## Tuesday 14 December

### Psalm 34.15-22

The eyes of God are on the righteous:  
and his ears towards their cry.

The Lord sets his face against wrongdoers:  
to root out their memory from the earth.

The righteous cry; the Lord hears it:  
and frees them from all their afflictions.

The Lord is close to those who are broken-hearted:  
and the crushed in spirit he saves.

The trials of the righteous are many:  
but our God delivers us from them all.

He guards all our bones:  
so that not one is broken.

Evil will slay the wicked:  
and those who hate the righteous will be destroyed.

The Lord ransoms the lives of his servants:  
and none who hide in him will be destroyed.

As 2021 draws to a close, injustice and the 'Us versus them' mentality is still palpable. It seems to be easily agitated and inflamed.

The psalmist addresses injustice and the seeming unfairness of our wonky world and reminds us that there is only one judge and none who "hide in Him we will be destroyed". It is through the innocent One in the crib and by the welcome of his Mother Mary, that divisions are dissolved, fresh beginnings are made possible and a noisy world is hushed.

## Some recordings to listen to:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtBkrD3s\\_iA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GtBkrD3s_iA)  
Choir of Salisbury Cathedral
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYmC\\_VKOva8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BYmC_VKOva8)  
Psalm 34:15-22 (Spoken and sung in Willowfield Church)

## Questions

1. In your life / community who are the 'us' and who are 'them'?
2. When have you been 'us'? When have you been 'them'?
3. What are the issues that divide these individuals and groups?
4. How might these issues or barriers be overcome or at least be lived with in patience and understanding?

## Prayer

Mother Mary, you welcomed the Magi and the shepherds to be with your Son in the home of the crib. Help us to see that all are to be accepted and received with joy. May we imitate that same hospitality in deed and in spirit to all who find their way to our home and our lives. We ask this in the name of the Christ-child, Jesus our Lord Amen.

## Wednesday 15 December

### Psalm 85: 8 - 13

I will hear what the Lord God will speak:  
for he will speak peace to his people,  
to his faithful ones, whose hearts are turned to him.  
Truly his salvation is near to those that fear him:  
and his glory shall dwell in our land.  
Mercy and truth are met together:  
righteousness and peace have kissed each other;  
Truth shall flourish out of the earth:  
and righteousness shall look down from heaven.  
The Lord will also give us all that is good:  
and our land shall yield its plenty.  
For righteousness shall go before him:  
and tread the path before his feet.

On the surface of it, this portion of psalm 85 appears luscious and inviting. All this meeting, kissing, righteousness, (mentioned three times), peace, mercy and truth all sound pretty jolly good. But they are dependent upon the willingness of us to listen. "I will hear what the Lord God will speak:"

This sounds easy, but it ain't. The hurdy gurdy of Advent, the piped music and the spaghetti of logistics, can quash even the sound of the angels and the screech of the Christchild.

We can only hear if we want to listen. There is none so deaf as those who register the words and dismiss them with their next heartbeat.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQUSD\\_f7Hyw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQUSD_f7Hyw)  
Choir of Westminster Abbey
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beXiHApftuE>  
Francesca La Rosa

## Questions

1. When do you think you listen best? Morning, evening, another time? Why do you think this is so?
2. What are the 'noises' that prohibit you from listening to the gurgles of the Christ-child?
3. Why do you think we are unwilling to hear and what are the consequences of our 'deafness'?

## Prayer

Heavenly Father, you gave your Son to us on a still black night so that righteousness, truth and peace may flourish in our land. So, still our lives, and quieten our hearts, that we may want to listen afresh and receive the joyous salvation that you have in store for us, even the murmuring child on the putrid straw, Jesus Christ our Lord Amen.

## Thursday 16 December

### Psalm 30:1 – 5

I will exalt you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up from the depths:  
and have not suffered my foes to triumph over me.

O Lord my God, I cried to you:  
and you have made me whole.

You brought me back, O Lord, from the land of silence:  
you saved my life from among those that go down to the Pit.

Sing praises to the Lord, all you his faithful ones:  
and give thanks to his holy name.

For if in his anger is havoc,  
in his good favour is life:  
heaviness may endure for a night,  
but joy comes in the morning.



The psalmist here has clearly suffered some kind of affliction and it would seem that it was not just a scrape of the knee or a mild misfortune. The psalmist found themselves living in the 'land of silence' where there was no music, dancing or laughter. It was the 'heaviness of a night', it was 'the depths'.

What makes this psalm so appealing is not just the passing nature of hardship, but that the psalm speaks authentically to our own calamities and catastrophes, the times in our lives when 'foes' threaten to overtake and triumph over us. Perhaps the Psalmist experienced a "Covid year".

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCfXsP3knk4>  
Jubilee Church (Contemporary)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URZ8YKkoWms>  
Choir of Salisbury Cathedral

### Questions

1. Who, or what are your foes?
2. Who are the people that you think might live in the 'land of silence'? Why?
3. When have you been surprised by joy?

### Prayer

When it was night and the land was silent your Almighty Word leapt from heaven and came to us with the joy of a new born child.

Come to us in the heaviness of our waiting. Come to us in our broken lives, in our broken lives, in our broken bread.

Even so, come Lord Jesus.

## Friday 17 December

### Psalm 72:15 – 19

Long may he live, and be given of the gold of Sheba:  
may prayer be made for him continually,  
may they bless him every day.

Let there be abundance of wheat in the land:  
let it flourish on the tops of the mountains;  
Let its ears grow fat like the grain of Lebanon:  
and its sheaves thicken like the grass of the field.

Let his name live for ever:  
and endure as long as the sun.

Let all peoples use his name in blessing:  
and all nations call him blessed.

The psalm puts a great deal of hope and trust in the future of this person it describes; but it also looks forward to a time when poverty is quashed and there is a marvellous harvest of wheat. A future when prosperity is the universal, every day experience.

As Christians we read this psalm of hope through 'Advent glasses,' thinking automatically of the Christ-child and the blessings that He will bring to the world. But not everyone has a fine pair of purple trim Advent glasses and not everyone has bumper crops.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCCwBqiQdk>  
Hymn: Hail to the Lord's Anointed
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g1dSy2Togxg>  
Psalm 72 ready by David Suchet

## Questions

1. If a 21st century, secular person was to read this psalm without 'Advent glasses', who would they think the psalm refers to?
2. What is it about a new born child that kindles such hope, not just for the child, not just for us, but for the wider community into which the child is born?
3. My father was a wheat farmer in the Wimmera. Every year I am sure that he hoped for a harvest like the one described in this psalm. His hopes were not always realised. Sit down quietly with him on a stinky hot Warracknabeal day, over a chilly beer. How would you reconcile this psalm with his dismal harvest?
4. When do you think this abundant harvest might happen for us?

## Saturday 18 December

### Psalm 71:17 – 21

O God, you have taught me from my youth upward:  
and to this day, I proclaim your marvellous works.  
Forsake me not, O God, in my old age,  
when I am grey-headed:  
till I have shown the strength of your arm  
to future generations,  
and your might to those that come after.  
Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens:  
great are the things that you have done;  
O God, who is like you?  
You have burdened me with many and bitter troubles,  
O turn and renew me:  
and raise me up again from the depths of the earth.

The psalmist here is looking back over their life, and far from taking it easy, they realise that there is work to be done. God's work needs to be proclaimed. Future generations should be shown the strength of God's arm.

There is also a note of trepidation. God has burdened the author with 'many and bitter troubles' and the psalmist fears that they may be forsaken. Hence there is a petition to be renewed and raised up again.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5gi\\_1TNhhM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f5gi_1TNhhM)  
Choir of Lincoln Cathedral
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLg6eZlkvS0>  
Jenny Rose Wilson (Contemporary)

### Questions

1. Whilst being 'grey headed' comes with the advantages of perspective and hindsight, there are also well founded fears. What are your fears for yourself in the future, where do you 'park them' and how do you address them?
2. Does God really 'burden us with many and bitter troubles'? If so, what might be God's rationale for behaving this way? If not, why do many and bitter troubles come our way?
3. What lessons did God teach you in your youth?
4. What do you hope to pass onto future generations?

### Prayer

Eternal God, from age to age you have always loved us and instructed us in your ways of wisdom and understanding. Weave into the fabric of our daily lives the lessons that we need to learn, so that future generations will know your strength, your wonder and your joy, even in the Christ child, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Questions for the week.

These questions can be used by individuals or can be used to stimulate a weekly group discussion from those using the notes daily.

1. All of us need to be called back to the adventure where we trust and ... jump. Did you find yourself being asked to jump this week? Flicking through the coming week do you see where you might be asked to 'jump'?
2. The year 2022 is a fresh page with no mistakes in it. What do you hope to write there? What do you hope that your community/parish/nation will write there? What insights do you bring with you from the Psalms?
3. If you could buy a kilo of 'righteousness' from the deli section of the supermarket, what would it look like, taste like? What would be its properties, it's use by date? How much would you expect to pay for it?
4. How are you different from the person you were at the start of the week or on January 1st 2021? Who would you like to be this time next week, or next Christmass?

# Week Four

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## The Rev'd Netta Hill

Netta Hill is a recently locally ordained priest in the Parish of Port Fairy. She has worked as a Registered Nurse, in alcohol and drugs, and as an Industrial chaplain. She has taught Tai chi for many years. She loves to camp, walk and garden. . When possible she and her husband Allen love to visit their families with 10 grandchildren.

## Psalms

We are now in the last week before Christmas. We wait with anticipation, for the birth of Jesus. Our psalms this week are mostly full of joy, hope and encouragement. Hope for ourselves and for the world. I encourage you to say the psalm aloud or to listen to the recording.

## Sunday 19 December

### Song of Mary

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord:  
My spirit rejoices in God my saviour,  
Who has looked with favour on his lowly servant:  
From this day all generations will call me blessed.  
The Almighty has done great things for me:  
and Holy is His name  
God has mercy on those that fear him:  
from generation to generation.  
The Lord has shown strength with his arm:  
and scattered the proud in their conceit  
Casting down the mighty from their thrones:  
and lifting up the lowly.

God has filled the hungry with good things:  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has come to the aid of his servant Israel:  
to remember the promise of mercy,  
The promise made to our forbears:  
to Abraham and his children forever

The song of Mary or the Magnificat is one the most famous and favourite songs of praise in Christianity. It is a song of Joy. There is recognition and response, as Mary uses her knowledge of the scriptures to acknowledges what God has done for her and will do for Israel.

Mary wanted to share her good news with Elizabeth, whom she loved and trusted, and whom she knew s would understand her joy, as they shared an experience of unusual conceptions.

They are able to celebrate together the greatness and faithfulness of God

**Some recordings to listen to:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3E7QWLyDWe8>  
Hymn: Tell out my soul
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SLUZM3nJ4sg>  
Magnificat Gregorian Chant (Latin with English Subtitles)

## Questions

1. What has been “a dream come true for you.” How did you celebrate and thank God?
2. Do you remember to share with others, the good things God has done in your life?

## Prayer

Lord our Saviour, our hope is you: No one is beyond your love, no one is beyond your saving power. Give us grace to recognise you and welcome you as you come to us: through Jesus Christ our lord. Amen. *David Adam.*

## Monday 20 December

### Psalm 24: 1-6

The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it:  
the compass of the world and those who dwell therein.  
For he has founded it upon the seas:  
and established it upon the waters.  
Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord:  
or who shall stand in his holy place.  
Those who have clean hands and a pure heart:  
who have not set their souls upon idols,  
nor sworn their oath to a lie.  
They shall receive blessings from the Lord:  
and recompense from the God of their salvation.  
Of such a kind as this are those who seek him:  
those who seek your face, O god of Jacob.

This psalm was thought to have been written for the occasion of the entrance of the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem during the reign of David.



It expresses faith in God of the universe, the creator God. It is a psalm which encourages us to come to God with an open and honest heart, and to be open to receiving all the blessings which God gives us. It also reminds us that we are stewards of Gods' earth.

**Some recordings to listen to:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FsOZ3UsUbNA>  
Keith and Kristyn Getty (Contemporary)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABoNMdvYFo>  
Psalm 24 read by David Suchet

**Questions**

1. Have you been open to all that God has to offer you this week?
2. How have you cared for God's earth this week?

**Prayer**

Creator God thank you for this world, may we care for it and share its abundance. May I be open to receive your blessings each day with a grateful and joyful heart. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Tuesday 21 December

### Psalm 33: 17-21

But the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him:  
on those that trust in his unfailing love,  
To deliver them from death:  
and to feed them in the time of dearth.  
We have waited eagerly for the Lord:  
for he is our help and our shield.  
Surely our hearts shall rejoice in him:  
for we have trusted in his holy name:  
Let your merciful kindness be upon us,  
    O Lord: even as our hope is in you.

Comment: this psalm is one of encouragement, but it also challenges us to have complete trust in God. This is not always easy to do. Sometimes we have to look back to see that God was present not only in our good times but also in our difficult situations.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GDCgpXcaO-Q>  
Guildford Cathedral Choir
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7mAUlO\\_T4c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7mAUlO_T4c)  
Francesca La Rosa

### Questions

1. Has there been a time when you have “waited eagerly” and the Lord seemed missing in action! How did you find God, or did God find you?
2. Do you think that Covid restrictions have increased your trust in God? How?

## Prayer

Lord and Heavenly Father, you have brought safely to this new day: keep us by your mighty power, protect us from sin, guard us from every kind of danger, and in all we do this day direct us in the fulfilling of your purpose, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*APBA*

## Wednesday 22 December

### Song of Hannah

My heart exults in the Lord:  
my strength is exalted in my God.  
My mouth derides my enemies:  
because I rejoice in your salvation.  
There is no holy one like you, O Lord:  
nor any rock like you, our God.  
For you are a God of Knowledge:  
and by you our actions are weighed.  
The bows of the mighty are broken:  
but the feeble gird on strength.  
Those who were full now search for bread:  
but those who were hungry are well fed.  
The barren woman has borne sevenfold:  
but she who has many children is forlorn.  
Both the poor and the rich are of your making:  
you bring low and you also exalt.  
You raise up the poor from the dust:  
and lift the needy from the ash heap.  
You make them sit with the rulers:  
and inherit a place of honour.  
For the pillars of the earth are yours:  
and on them you have set the world.

This is a song of rejoicing, as Hannah, a previously barren woman, keeps her promise to return to God, Samuel, the child she had prayed for. This would have been an extremely difficult action for a mother to take. But Hannah praises God and focuses on the strength of God to use the powerless to break the power of the Mighty, and transform the lives of the weak. Hannah's faithfulness is rewarded by having 5 more children, and Samuel will anoint the first kings of Israel.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6VplwbGJkI>  
Jason Silver (Contemporary)
- <https://youtu.be/PQR0aKGSwwg>  
Read by Sarah Barlow

### Questions

1. What has been the most difficult decision you have made. Did you take it to God in prayer first?
2. Who would you identify as "the poor and needy" in your community. What action can you and your parish take to assist?

### Prayer

Lord help us to have complete trust in you, when we have to make difficult decisions. Give us thankful hearts, and a generous spirit to those in need. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Thursday 23 December

### Psalm 25: 3-

Show me your ways O lord:  
and teach me your paths.

Lead me in the ways of your truth, and teach me:  
for you are the God of my salvation.

In you have I hoped all day long:  
because of your goodness, O Lord.

Call to mind your compassion and your loving-kindness for they are  
from of old.

Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: but  
according to your mercy think on me.

Good and upright is the Lord:  
therefore will he direct sinners in the way.

The meek he will guide in the path of justice:  
and teach the humble his ways.

### Reflection

Today's psalm has lament, petition, praise and lots of hope!! These mixed emotions are part of our relationship with God. We all experience the highs and lows of life. At times we wish we had made different choices, but this psalm gives us hope for the future with the knowledge of God's forgiveness.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7as6VJvKbdY>  
Francesca La Rosa
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f91PeHlyeQU>  
St Thomas Episcopal Choirs

## Questions

1. How have you been challenged this week? Did you seek God's guidance?
2. How have you been blessed by God this week?

## Prayer

God bless our contradictions, those parts of us which seem out of character.... Let us be creatures of paradox and variety: creatures of contrast: Light and shade: creatures of faith. God be our constant. Let us step out of character into the unknown, to struggle and love and do what we will. Leunig

## Friday 24 December

### Psalm 89: 19-29

You spoke once in a vision:  
and said to your faithful one,  
"I have set a youth above a warrior:  
I have exalted a young man out of the people.  
I have found my servant David:  
and anointed him with holy oil.  
My hand shall uphold him:  
and my arm shall strengthen him.  
No enemy shall deceive him:  
nor shall the wicked hurt him.  
I will crush his adversaries before him:  
and strike down those that hate him.  
My faithfulness and loving-kindness shall be with him:  
and through my name his head shall be lifted high.  
I will set the hand of his dominion upon the Western Sea:  
and his right hand shall stretch to the streams of Mesopotamia.  
He will call to me "You are my father:  
my God and the rock of my salvation".

I will make him my first- born son:  
and highest among the kings of the earth.  
I will maintain my loving –kindness toward him:  
and my covenant with him shall stand firm.”

This psalm recalls the words which God spoke to the prophet Nathan to deliver David, the shepherd boy, as God’s anointed. God promises to sustain protect and strengthen him. These promises are also made to each one of us. These words speak of God’s faithfulness, God’s promise to Israel and to us.

**Some recordings to listen to:**

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYHFBuSp754&list=RDgYHFBuSp754&start\\_radio=1](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYHFBuSp754&list=RDgYHFBuSp754&start_radio=1)  
Jason Silver (Contemporary)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySXVX1EtO5Q>  
Wakefield Choir

### **Questions**

1. Have you ever broken a promise, or has someone broken their promise to you. How did that affect your relationship?
2. What does it feel like to be absolutely sure that someone, as God does, will keep their promise?

### **Prayer**

Great is your faithfulness.  
Morning by morning new mercies we see.  
All we have needed your hand has provided.  
Great is your faithfulness, Lord God to me.

*Thomas Obadiah Chisholm.*

## Questions for the week.

These questions can be used by individuals or can be used to stimulate a weekly group discussion from those using the notes daily.

1. How many ways can you think of to praise God? Maybe you could write a poem, sing a song, dance!
2. As we come to the end of Advent and celebrate the birth of Jesus, what are your hopes and dreams for the coming year, for you, your church, your community, your world?



# Christmas week

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All of this week's readings are psalms of praise, which is entirely appropriate at this time of the year, as we thank God for the birth of his Son: he became one of us. Jesus is the complete manifestation of the 'presence of the LORD', for which the psalmist in today's reading is expressing joyful praise.

These five psalms were written for communal praise of God. Expressed in similar language and following a similar pattern, they appear to have been used for a very long time for worship in the Temple. The openings of Ps 98 and Ps 96 are not therefore referring to singing a "new" song, but the psalmist is calling on us to "renew our song to the Lord"—a very fitting thing to do in the season of Christmas, with its long history of worship and traditions for celebrating.

Despite their similarities, each of these psalms has its own distinctive character, which no doubt reflected the writers' different personalities and emphases.

## Christmas Day

### Psalm 98

O sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done marvellous things.  
His right hand and his holy arm  
have shown his power to save.  
The LORD has made known his salvation;  
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of the nations.  
He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness  
to the house of Israel.  
All the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation of our God.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.  
Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.  
With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD.

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
the world and those who live in it.  
Let the rivers clap their hands;  
let the hills sing together for joy  
at the presence of the LORD, for he is coming  
to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with equity.

About one-fifth of all the psalms are hymns of praise to God. Some are personal expressions of the psalmist himself; others are composed for communal singing, by the "righteous" or by the people of Israel. Today's psalm is one of the few intended to be universal: it calls on the whole earth to take part. In a lovely series of images, the poet sees the performance beginning with an orchestra of humans, and gradually all of nature joins in a crescendo of delight—the seas start roaring, and the rivers clap their hands, keeping time for the hills as they sing along. What an appropriate vision for the day on which we remember with thanksgiving how God appeared among us in the person of his Son!

The writer focusses on two aspects of God's glory that would be gloriously manifested in the events of Christmas Day, centuries after he wrote the psalm. God has, he says, demonstrated to "all the ends of the earth" his power to save. And he will come to "judge the world". We tend to think of judgement in terms of punishing wrongdoing; in the Bible the emphasis is far more on setting right things that have got out of kilter. Both saving the world and restoring

proper order are summed up in the words of the angel who told Joseph that Mary will have a son, and “you shall call him Jesus [meaning *God helps us*], because he will save his people from their sins”.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDmIddF7DfQ>  
Celtic Women "Joy to the World"
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uytw03gCVcC>  
Wakefield Choir

### Questions

1. In what special ways can I “renew my song to the Lord” on this very significant day?
2. Does creation really praise God, or is that simply the psalmist exercising poetic licence? If it does praise him, in what ways?

### Prayer for the day

Heavenly Father, who have shown your love to humanity by sending your only Son into this world to enable us to restore our relationship with you, may your message of salvation be heard across the globe at this special season. May those who live in darkness and the shadow of death see the great light, and may the whole world join in a glorious anthem of praise to you, our Creator. I pray this in Jesus’ wonderful name, Amen.

# Boxing Day

## Psalm 148

Praise the LORD!

Praise the LORD from the heavens;  
praise him in the heights!

Praise him, all his angels;  
praise him, all his host!

Praise him, sun and moon;  
praise him, all you shining stars!

Praise him, you highest heavens,  
and you waters above the heavens!

Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for he commanded and they were created.

He established them for ever and ever;  
he fixed their bounds, which cannot be passed.<sup>[a]</sup>

Praise the LORD from the earth,  
you sea monsters and all deeps,  
fire and hail, snow and frost,  
stormy wind fulfilling his command!

Mountains and all hills,  
fruit trees and all cedars!

Wild animals and all cattle,  
creeping things and flying birds!

Kings of the earth and all peoples,  
princes and all rulers of the earth!

Young men and women alike,  
old and young together!

Let them praise the name of the LORD,  
for his name alone is exalted;  
his glory is above earth and heaven.

He has raised up a horn for his people,  
praise for all his faithful,  
for the people of Israel who are close to him.

### **Praise the LORD!**

Today's psalm, like yesterday's, is one of some 20 or so that were probably composed as hymns for congregational singing. But more than the congregation: the psalmist first calls for this singing to spread to the entire world, then names one after another everything that can be seen in the sky, in the earth, and under the earth to join in a mighty crescendo of praise to the Creator. Towards the end, the reasons for praising God are given, followed by a simple closing line.

Interestingly, the order in which the different elements of creation are named roughly follows the order of the creation story in Genesis. There is a sense that, as the focus falls on each, it is brought into being in turn, to join in the chorus of praise.

To appreciate the book of Psalms properly, it is essential to try to see the world as the psalmists did. Life for them and their audiences was largely a matter of subsistence farming. People lived entirely in and through nature, as fish live in water. We tend to think of different elements mentioned in this psalm as inanimate (sun, moon, stars ...) or animate (wild animals, birds, people ...). The psalmist makes no such distinction. The entire creation, including human beings, is one amazing complex, at times inspiring, at times frightening.

In the modern world, when we talk of learning about God from nature, it tends to be in terms of poetic images. The massive solidity of a mountain, for example, is a metaphor for God's unchangeableness. For the psalmists, by contrast, the whole created world is the embodiment of spiritual truth, a revelation of God's character. A mountain is an actual manifestation of God: his power and constancy are embedded in it.

You may find it enhances your enjoyment of this psalm to imagine singing it in the bush, with different groups of people, plants, and animals joining in until it reaches its glorious crescendo.

**Some recordings to listen to:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Hhye2y1S4E>  
Graham Kendrick (Contemporary)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1M1t3UplZTI>  
Choral Anthem: Gustav Holst

## **Monday 27 December**

### **Psalm 97**

- <sup>1</sup> The LORD is king! Let the earth rejoice;  
let the many coastlands be glad!
- <sup>2</sup> Clouds and thick darkness are all around him;  
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.
- <sup>3</sup> Fire goes before him,  
and consumes his adversaries on every side.
- <sup>4</sup> His lightnings light up the world;  
the earth sees and trembles.
- <sup>5</sup> The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,  
before the Lord of all the earth.
- <sup>6</sup> The heavens proclaim his righteousness;  
and all the peoples behold his glory.
- <sup>7</sup> All worshippers of images are put to shame,  
those who make their boast in worthless idols;  
all gods bow down before him.
- <sup>8</sup> Zion hears and is glad,  
and the towns of Judah rejoice,  
because of your judgements, O God.
- <sup>9</sup> For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth;  
you are exalted far above all gods.

<sup>10</sup> The LORD loves those who hate evil;  
he guards the lives of his faithful;  
he rescues them from the hand of the wicked.

<sup>11</sup> Light dawns for the righteous,  
and joy for the upright in heart.

<sup>12</sup> Rejoice in the LORD, O you righteous,  
and give thanks to his holy name!

Today's psalm is in one sense very much in the mould of those of the previous two days (and, indeed, the remainder of this week). Like them, it is a hymn for communal worship. As in Pss 98 and 148, it begins with a call to all the audience to join in; as in Ps 148, this call is repeated in the final verse, rounding off the hymn. There is a subtle difference, however: in those two psalms, the audience is urged to praise God; here, they are called to 'rejoice' in him.

The focus of today's psalm also contrasts significantly with that of the others set for this week: the fearsome and threatening aspects of God's creation. It is very likely that the psalmist's inspiration came from a volcanic eruption in his vicinity: note the references to clouds and thick darkness (v.2); fire and lightnings (vv.3 & 4); and to mountains' melting like wax (v.5). It is also implied by v. 6, where he says the whole world 'beheld his glory'—in other words, everyone experienced the majestic but terrifying explosion of the volcano.

But why is the writer calling for rejoicing? Surely not because of such a terrifying event? The real reason is not explicitly stated; it may be that he felt it was more effective to hint at the cause for rejoicing and let the congregation work it out for themselves. That hint is in v.10: God has guarded the lives of the faithful. In other words, he has saved them from this massive natural disaster. This is why they are called to 'rejoice in the Lord'.

This sheds an interesting light on vv. 7—11. The whole congregation, as they join in the hymn, would be drawn together with a sense of common identity and destiny. One can imagine them thinking, "We,

the people of Israel, who trust in God, have been gloriously saved by him. We are not like those who worship impotent idols.”

Finally, in v.11, the psalmist reflects on how the horrifying memories of the eruption have been transformed into beautiful experiences for good people. The fire and lightning back then now dawn as light in their minds; the fear-inspiring “glory” is turned to joy.

**Some recordings to listen to:**

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lm4uerDHg6Q>  
Wakefield Cathedral Choir
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeMfpoGtZdk>  
Psalm 97 read by David Suchet

## **Tuesday 28 December, Holy Innocents’ Day**

### **Psalm 124**

- <sup>1</sup> If it had not been the LORD who was on our side  
—let Israel now say—
- <sup>2</sup> if it had not been the LORD who was on our side,  
when our enemies attacked us,
- <sup>3</sup> then they would have swallowed us up alive,  
when their anger was kindled against us;
- <sup>4</sup> then the flood would have swept us away,  
the torrent would have gone over us;
- <sup>5</sup> then over us would have gone  
the raging waters.
- <sup>6</sup> Blessed be the LORD,  
who has not given us  
as prey to their teeth.
- <sup>7</sup> We have escaped like a bird  
from the snare of the fowlers;



the snare is broken,  
and we have escaped.

<sup>8</sup>Our help is in the name of the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth.

This psalm was clearly written to be sung, chanted, or dramatically proclaimed in a service in the Temple, or perhaps at some sort of outdoor festival. It may be that the first line was said or sung solo by the leader as a sort of introduction, setting the mood. He then calls on the audience to join in (“let Israel now say”), and the rest is performed in unison. The brevity and simple theme would have made it easy for the congregation to learn the psalm by ear—which was important in a society in which very few people could read—and thus join in confidently.

The “simple theme” referred to above is giving thanks to God for delivering the nation from an enemy’s army. This is expressed in two lively images. The first, and more expanded one, likens the invading army to torrents of floodwaters rushing in and inundating the country. The image is described three times: verses 3—5 each consist of two parts, with the second part echoing the first but in slightly different words. This kind of repetition, saying the same thing in different ways, is known as “parallelism”; it is common in all Hebrew poetry, including the Psalms.

The second image likens the enemy forces to fowlers (bird-hunters), who ensnare their prey and then take it away to eat it. But, says the psalmist, God sprang the trap and we were able to fly away, out of reach of their predatory fingers.

Notice that the poet doesn’t say *how* God delivered them—presumably this had occurred quite recently, and the audience would have been well aware of the event themselves. The important thing is not to focus on what happened, but on what it demonstrates about God’s power and his love for his people.

## Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PLyDwflb4Q8>  
Chant from the Hermitage
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xAqkRGVdHZ4>  
Spoken and then choral

## Questions

1. Have I, or someone close to me, been rescued from an apparently impossible situation? Can I think of an image or two that captures the delightful sense of delivery? (*Use the image[s] in a prayer of thanksgiving.*)
2. It is, thank God, very unlikely that anyone reading this has experienced being attacked by a personal or national enemy, but are there other things in your life that give you the sense of being overwhelmed or trapped?

## Prayer for the day

Heavenly Father, thank you for caring about me and those close to me. Give us all the grace, when we feel trapped or threatened by life's circumstances, to place ourselves in your hands, and the strength to trust that you will mercifully deliver us. I ask in the name of him who brought salvation to all humankind: Jesus Christ, your Son, Our Lord. Amen.

## The final three readings

These are all from Psalm 96. Like the other psalms we have looked at this week, this is a congregational hymn of praise, which the whole world is called to join in. Although it is clearly one whole psalm, it falls fairly naturally into the three stanzas, each with its own slightly different emphasis. We focus on these one by one to bring our Advent readings to a close.

The “parallelism” mentioned in yesterday’s notes is evident in Ps 96. Although, as we noted, this is common in Hebrew poetry, it is fairly rare for a whole psalm to be composed in this way. This pattern suggests that Ps 96 may have been intended to be performed responsively. The first line in each verse could have been sung or chanted solo by the leader, with the whole congregation responding with the parallel second line.

Given the threefold structure of the psalm, it is possible that its performance may have been even more sophisticated. Between stanzas 1 and 2, and then 2 and 3, it would be possible to have a solo item, such as a reading of a relevant passage from the Law (i.e., the first five books of our Bible). This would have made this psalm a highly memorable worship event.

For our readings, in order to preserve a sense of the overall unity of this psalm, you may find it helpful to read these introductory notes and the whole psalm each day, before focussing on the stanza selected for that day.

## Wednesday 29 December

### Psalm 96 (1)

- <sup>1</sup> O sing to the LORD a new song;  
sing to the LORD, all the earth.
- <sup>2</sup> Sing to the LORD, bless his name;  
tell of his salvation from day to day.
- <sup>3</sup> Declare his glory among the nations,  
his marvellous works among all the peoples.
- <sup>4</sup> For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;  
he is to be revered above all gods.
- <sup>5</sup> For all the gods of the peoples are idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens.
- <sup>6</sup> Honour and majesty are before him;  
strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

We start with the first stanza of Ps 96. It opens with the same call as that for Ps 98 (see Christmas Day): to “renew” our song to the Lord. This is a timely reminder to regular participants in worship services (in the psalmists’ day and in our own) not to allow our devotional practice to settle into mere empty ritual: it must be fresh and full of vitality every time.

The six verses very much echo the pattern of our previous four readings: the psalmist pours out praise to God, and calls on others to join in. Here, he addresses “all the earth”, but verses 3—6 suggest a focus on human beings, rather than, as in Ps 148 (Boxing Day), on the whole created order.

This focus on people includes their own gods, which introduces a subtle difference between this and those other psalms. The psalmist here is not only summoning the whole creation to enter into the praise of God: he is also, by implication, challenging humanity to a grand conversion. In his world, every human group (the “nations” or “peoples”) believed in its own particular god(s). But, says the

psalmist, your traditional gods are powerless idols (the Hebrew means *non-gods*). You must give them up, and praise the one true God. There was a hint of this in Ps 97: 7, but this psalm is a more direct challenge.

In our society, of course, idol worship is almost entirely unknown, but this reading is an important reminder to us not to put our trust in anything or anyone, other than Our Lord, to guide us through the ups and downs and uncertainties of life. Let us take up the psalmist's challenge to worship, to the exclusion of all else, the One who created and sustains the whole world, including us human beings.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nx0rCabJ16c>  
Hymn: O for a thousand tongues to sing
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy7Y0qRFkXk>  
Westminster Abbey Choir

### Questions

1. Am I tempted at times to allow things and people to take precedence over my faith in living my life day to day? What form do these temptations take?
2. What does it mean, in practical terms, to bless the Lord's name and to tell of his salvation from day to day?

### Prayer

Almighty God, your whole creation shows your glory. I praise you for your marvellous works, and in particular for the love you demonstrated in creating and sustaining, and sending your Son to save, all of humankind. Help me to live out your praise day by day, in the name of the one who is the Light of the World, Jesus Christ Our Lord.

## Thursday 30 December

### Psalm 96 (2)

<sup>7</sup> Pay tribute to the LORD, O families of the peoples,  
tribute to the LORD of glory and strength.

<sup>8</sup> tribute of the glory due his name;  
bring this offering, and come into his courts.

<sup>9</sup> Worship the LORD in holy splendour;  
tremble before him, all the earth.

Today's stanza continues the theme of yesterday's. Having challenged all people everywhere to give up their "non-gods" and worship God alone, the psalmist now encourages them to live out their conversion by engaging in the appropriate ritual of bringing their tributes of possessions, such as fruits from the harvest, along with 'offerings' or animals for sacrifice, to Him. The reference to God's "courts" is very likely to the Temple in Jerusalem. Because this is where the psalm was almost certainly intended to be sung, the psalmist is implicitly reinforcing the invitation, which was explicitly stated in our psalms for Christmas Day and Boxing Day, for the whole world to come together in a glorious hymn of praise to the Lord.

However much we might appreciate their artistry, the psalms are embedded in an ancient culture, and can seem outdated and irrelevant to us today. The act of handing over something we possess to the priests as part of worship is so foreign to us, and animal sacrifice so repulsive, that we can miss the underlying purpose. That was to acknowledge in the presence of the community that everything we humans have has been graciously granted by God. It was an act of worship both expressing gratitude by symbolically surrendering it back, and demonstrating faith that he will provide future needs.

We should remind ourselves that gratitude to and faith in God are the motivations we, too, share for coming together in worship. It is so easy for our worship services to become little more than a pleasant habit; the psalmist's words can be taken as encouragement for us to rediscover a passion that can transform worship in our churches.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IfkiUsk-lnM&t=37s>  
St Paul's Cathedral Choir
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FI5FQh39iVk&t=43s>  
Psalm 96 read by David Suchet

### Questions

1. What aspects of our regular worship services do I find most meaningful?
2. Could our services become more dynamic and engaging? In what ways?

### Prayer

Lord God, I pray that you will grant to me and to all members of our church community the gifts of gratitude and trust. Help us to forget our own concerns, needs, and desires, and to lose ourselves in wholehearted worship giving glory to you, our Lord, in "holy splendour". I ask this in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

## Friday 31 December

### Psalm 96 (3)

- <sup>10</sup> Say among the nations, 'The LORD is king!  
The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved.  
He will judge the peoples with equity.'
- <sup>11</sup> Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice;  
let the sea roar, and all that fills it;
- <sup>12</sup> let the field exult, and everything in it.  
Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy
- <sup>13</sup> before the LORD; for he is coming,  
for he is coming to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with his truth.

With this stanza, Ps 96 comes to an end on a note of great hope. The psalm opened with a call to renew our song to the Lord for the wonderful things he has done in the past. He made the heavens and the earth; he has done marvellous works for human beings and shown them his salvation. The psalm closes with a wonderful promise, a prediction that the Lord will actually come down and visit his earth.

Having challenged all peoples to abandon their utterly unrealistic hopes in worthless non-gods, the psalmist gives a glimpse of a glorious future in God's hands. Like the writer of Ps 148 (Boxing Day), he has an image of the whole physical world singing in ecstasy, because the Lord will come to judge the earth. As mentioned in the notes for Christmas Day, for the psalmists judgement was not about guilt and punishment. Judgement was a matter of putting back to rights a world so marred by human sin. When the Lord comes, he will right wrongs, restore order where at present we can see only disorder, and remove all causes of suffering.



In the Christmas season we celebrate his coming among us in human form, to start the life-giving process of judgement. Jesus' life on earth was, in one sense, a fulfilment of the vision of this stanza. But, in another sense, as Jesus himself taught, his coming restated its promise looking forward to a future time. Our Lord will come, and will judge the earth with righteousness and truth. We can join the chorus of the exultant fields and the singing trees to praise him, as we all look forward in joyful hope to his coming again and bringing his world to a triumphant climax.

### Some recordings to listen to:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lvdMVwHEefs>  
Wakefield Cathedral Choir
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY-9EWAEzH4>  
Sons of Korah (Contemporary)

### Questions

1. In what sense is the story of Christmas a fulfilment of the vision in this psalm?
2. What are the implications of God's coming in judgement for the way I lead my life from day to day?

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, our Saviour and our brother, you committed yourself totally to the restoration of all creation, even to the extent of dying on the cross. As I come to the end of 2021 and go forward into the new year, by your grace enable me to recommit myself unreservedly to you and to everyone with whom I will come into contact. Glory be to you, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Amen

## Final week: questions for group discussion

Many Christians are reluctant to speak about their faith. Should we be more willing to do so, given that in a number of places the psalmists urge their audience to talk to others ('peoples' and 'nations') about God's power and majesty, to noise abroad the story of his amazing works?

Have you gained any new insights into Psalms, on the one hand, and the nature of our faith on the other hand, as a result of this week's readings?

Imagine you were reworking a psalm such as 98, 97, or 148 for a contemporary audience. What images might best express their exultant praise of God?





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Advent 2021