

Psalm 24

4th Advent, Year A
Presentation; All Saints
Morning Prayer Tuesday Week 1
Office of Readings Sunday 4; Dedication of Church
Office of Readings Feasts of Mary

This psalm is part of a liturgical celebration of victory, or of the enthronement of YHWH in the New Year festival. There are echoes in it of Moses setting up the tabernacle (Exodus 40:20,34), David transferring the ark (2Samuel 6:13-15), and the return from exile (Ezekiel 43:4). YHWH, the Creator of the universe, has chosen Zion for his dwelling. The city must be worthy of God's presence and its inhabitants must be committed to the truth, living good lives from pure hearts. Its title reads: 'Of David. A Psalm*'.

Part One. YHWH the creator

**¹The earth is YHWH's*
and all that is in it, the
world, and those who
live in it;**

**²for he has founded it on
the seas, and established
it on the flowing waters.**

'Established it on the flowing waters' needs some explanation. According to the understanding of the day, under the land are subterranean waters that are connected to the ocean which surrounds the earth. This subterranean water wells up to the surface of the earth as springs and rivers. Compare the following:

Give thanks to YHWH who spread out the earth on the waters, for his kindness endures forever.

– Psalm 136:6

On YHWH as creator compare:

You have forgotten YHWH, your Maker, who stretched out the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth ... I have put my words in your mouth, and hidden you in the shadow of my hand, stretching out the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth, and saying to Zion, 'You are my people'.

– Isaiah 51:13,16

Thus says YHWH, who stretched out the heavens and founded the earth and formed the human spirit within.

– Zechariah 12:1

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements – surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone when the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?

– Job 38:4-7

Paul writes:

The earth and its fullness are the Lord's.

– 1Corinthians 10:26

Part Two. Dialogue as to who can enter the temple

Compare Psalm 15. Also the following:

Enter his gates with thanksgiving, his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name.

– Psalm 100:4

Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

– Psalm 122:2

Open the gates, so that the righteous nation that keeps faith may enter in.

– Isaiah 26:2

The priest responds. To enter into the temple a person should have ‘clean hands and pure heart’; that is to say our external activity should be in accordance with God’s will, and our hearts should be set on YHWH.

‘Longing’ translates the Hebrew *nepeš*. See the article ‘Being’ in the Introduction. To ‘deflect one’s longing to idols’ is to look to false gods to fulfil the yearning of our heart. Entering the temple should be an expression of our longing to be in communion with God.

If we are faithful to YHWH our lives will be blessed, and God, faithful to his covenant love, will come to our aid. The asterisks in the text point to the articles ‘Blessing’, ‘Justice’, and ‘Saving Help’ in the Introduction.

For reflections on seeking God’s face, see the commentaries on Psalm 4:6, Psalm 11:7 and Psalm 17:15.

³Who is able to ascend to the mount of YHWH? Who can stand in his holy place?

⁴The one who has clean hands and a pure heart*, who does not deflect his longing* to idols, nor take oaths deceitfully.

⁵Such a one will receive blessing* from YHWH, and justice* from the God who saves*.

⁶Such is the company of those who seek him; who seek your face, O God of Jacob.

[Selah*]

Part Three. YHWH enters the city

These verses are more ancient than the earlier sections.

⁷Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory* may enter.

⁸Who is this King of glory*?

YHWH*, the valiant hero, YHWH, mighty in battle.

⁹Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may enter.

¹⁰Who is this King of glory?

YHWH of hosts*, he is the King of glory.

[Selah*]

We can imagine David singing in this way as he brought the ark into Jerusalem:

David went and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the city of David with rejoicing; and when those who bore the ark of YHWH had gone six paces, he sacrificed an ox and a fatling. David danced before YHWH with all his might; David was girded with a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of YHWH with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet.

– 2Samuel 6:12-15

‘King of glory’(see the article ‘Glory’ in the Introduction) includes valour and victory in war:

YHWH is a warrior; YHWH is his name.

– Exodus 15:3

As noted in the article ‘Hosts’ in the Introduction, YHWH, the God of David, was expected to fight with Israel’s armies. However, YHWH is the King of all nations, and so can choose to lead other nations to victory:

Thus says YHWH to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped to subdue nations before him and strip kings of their robes, to open doors before him – and the gates shall not be closed.

– Isaiah 45:1

In the New Testament, the church celebrates Christ the priest-king ascending into the sanctuary of heaven:

We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever.

– Hebrews 6:19-20

For reasons that are obvious, this psalm is used on the occasion of the dedication of a church. It is used also on feasts of Mary, whose womb God chose as a ‘temple’ for his Son. Mary is also compared to the ark of the covenant.