

Psalm 122

1st Sunday of Advent Year A

Christ the King Year C

Evening Prayer 1 Sunday Week 4

Evening Prayer II Dedication of a Church and BVM

The psalmist is singing of Jerusalem. Playing on the sound of the word, he divides the song into two parts. In the first (verses 1-5) he plays on the sound of 'Jeru', and in the second (verses 6-9) he plays on the sound of 'salem'. There are indications of this same play on the name 'Jerusalem' in Psalm 137; 125:5; 128:5-6; Isaiah 2:2-5; 26:1-3; 32:17-19; 52:1; 54:12-14; 60; 66:10; Jeremiah 14:18-19; Ezekiel 7:23-25; and Zechariah 8:10-19 and 9:9-10. The title adds 'Of David' to the title that characterises all the psalms in the sub-group 120-134: 'A Song of Ascents'.

Part 1. The city (verses 1-5) Jerusalem

'Jeru'[Hebrew yêrû; יְרֻ] derives from the Hebrew verb [yārâ; יָרָה] meaning 'to lay stones', 'to found'. It is similar in sound to the Hebrew word for city ['îr; עִיר]. Jerusalem is called simply 'the city' in Ezekiel 7:23 and Psalm 87:1,3. Tobit eulogises the city:

My soul blesses the Lord, the great King!
For Jerusalem will be built as his house for all ages.
How happy I will be if a remnant of my descendants should survive
to see your glory and acknowledge the King of heaven.
The gates of Jerusalem will be built with sapphire and emerald,
and all your walls with precious stones.
The towers of Jerusalem will be built with gold,
and their battlements with pure gold.
The streets of Jerusalem will be paved
with ruby and with stones of Ophir.
The gates of Jerusalem will sing hymns of joy,
and all her houses will cry, 'Hallelujah!
Blessed be the God of Israel!'
and the blessed will bless the holy name forever and ever.'

– Tobit 13:15-17

Verse 1 recalls the psalmist's joy when he was invited to join the pilgrimage. Verse 2 expresses his delight at having arrived at his destination.

¹What joy when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of YHWH*!'

²And now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

He is impressed with how well constructed the city is.

³Jerusalem – built as a city, so unified and compact.

City of peace

⁴To it the tribes go up, the tribes of YHWH, as was decreed for Israel, to give thanks to the name of YHWH.

⁵For there the throne for judgment* was set up, the throne of the house of David.

⁶Pray for the peace* of Jerusalem: May they prosper who love you.

⁷Peace* be within your walls, and security within your towers.

After the destruction of the northern kingdom in 721BC, Jerusalem was the main cultic centre for all who worshipped YHWH.

Three times a year all your males shall appear before YHWH your God at the place that he will choose: at the festival of unleavened bread, at the festival of weeks, and at the festival of booths. They shall not appear before YHWH empty-handed.

– Deuteronomy 16:16

Jerusalem was also the centre for the administration of justice.

Part Two. Peace (verses 6-9) Jerusalem

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her.

– Isaiah 66:10

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

– Matthew 23:37

Walk about Zion, go all around it, count its towers, admire its ramparts; consider its citadels, that you may tell the next generation: this is God, our eternal God, forever our guide.

– Psalm 48:12-14

By way of contrast we might reflect on the following:

The Lord has scorned his altar, disowned his sanctuary; he has delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; a clamour was raised in the house of YHWH as on a day of festival. YHWH determined to lay in ruins the wall of daughter Zion; he stretched the line; he did not withhold his hand from destroying; he caused rampart and wall to lament; they languish together.

– Lamentation 2:7-8

Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!'

– Luke 10:5

Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem, or who will bemoan you? Who will turn aside to ask about your welfare?

– Jeremiah 15:5

God will give you evermore the name 'Righteous Peace, Godly Glory.'

– Baruch 5:4

⁸For my family and friends I pray for your peace.

⁹For the house of YHWH our God, I wish you well.

There is a powerful contrast in the lament of Jesus:

As Jesus came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.

–Luke 19:41-44

We might reflect on the Book of Revelation which speaks of the Christian assembly as the new Jerusalem:

- thrones for judgment (Revelation 20:4,11,15).
See also Daniel 7

- beauty (Revelation 21:11-21).
See also Ezekiel 40-41; Isaiah 54 and 60.

- twelve gates (Revelation 21:12-14).
See also Ezekiel 48:30-34

- the temple is no longer needed:

I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

– Revelation 21:22