

09. Psalms 19-22

Praying Psalm 19 with Jesus



¹The heavens proclaim the glory of God,
displaying the magnificence of God's creation.

²Day unto day takes up the story;
night unto night makes known the message.

³Without a word, without a sound,
without a voice being heard,

⁴their announcement goes out through all the earth,
their proclamation to the utmost bounds of the world.

⁵In the heavens God has set a tent for the sun.

It comes forth like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
like an athlete eager to run the race.

⁶It rises in one extremity of the heavens,
and its course runs to the other.

Nothing escapes its burning heat.

⁷GOD's law is perfect; it revives the soul.

GOD's decrees are sure; they make wise the simple.

⁸GOD's precepts are right; they delight the heart.

GOD's commandment is clear; it enlightens the eyes.

⁹The awe inspired by GOD is pure and enduring.

GOD's judgments are true and all of them just.

¹⁰More precious are they than gold, than the finest gold;
sweeter are they than honey dripping from a comb.

¹¹Your servant is enlightened by them.

In keeping them there is great reward.

[¹²Who is so sensitive as to observe hidden sins?

Forgive me mine, O my God.

¹³Keep my pride in check; break its grip upon me.

Then I will be blameless, innocent of grave sin.]

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the reflections of my heart
be acceptable to You, O GOD, my rock.



The Psalmist contemplates the heavens and listens to their silent message. Nature is inviting us to join in its cosmic hymn of praise (verses 1-4). Paul quotes this psalm to speak of the wonderful way in which the Gospel message is spreading the knowledge of God's redeeming love throughout the world:

‘Have they not heard? Indeed they have; for ‘**their announcement goes out through all the earth, and their proclamation to the utmost bounds of the world**’ (Romans 10:18).



The psalmist then focuses on the sun. Like a bridegroom after a night of love, the sun comes forth to run its course with joy. We are invited to do the same.

Jesus is the bridegroom, warming our hearts with his Love. 'By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us' (Luke 1:78). 'The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world' (John 1:9).

To complement the message of the heavens, God gives us the clear instruction of the Torah to guide us as to the course we are to run with joy and love (verses 7-10). Jesus' loved to do his Father's will. He urges us to share this love with him.



{¹²Who is so sensitive as to observe hidden sins?
Forgive me mine, O my God.}

Only God can educate us and refine our conscience so that we become more sensitive to the inadvertent ways in which we fail to do God's will.

Only God can scrutinise the hidden depths of our psyche and awaken us to the subtle ways in which we distort our lives and the lives of others by our misdirected desires and impure intentions.

Only God can liberate us from our pride and folly and our slavery to wilful sin.

So we plead with God to deliver us from all that deafens us to God's voice and all that hardens our hearts against following God's will (verses 12-13).

We know that Jesus was innocent of sin. We need to pray this verse, and to have Jesus by our side as we pray it, for we are called to let Christ live in us and share with us his innocence. We are to 'be perfect as our Father is perfect' (Matthew 5:48). This is possible if we open our hearts to welcome the Spirit of Love that Jesus shared with his Father.

This Spirit will purify our minds and hearts till we can say with Saint Paul: 'I live, no longer I. It is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, loving me and giving himself for me' (Galatians 2:19-20).

Psalm 19

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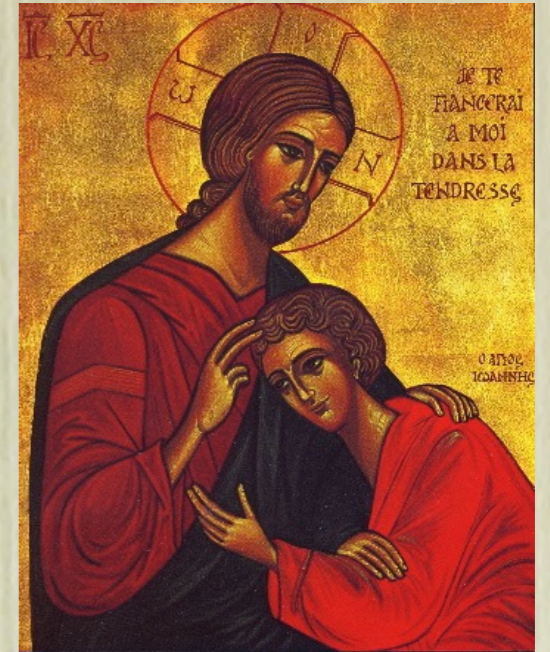
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Praying Psalm 20 with Jesus



¹In time of trouble may GOD respond to your plea.

May the God of Jacob protect you.

²From the sanctuary may God send you help,
giving you support from Zion.

³May God recall your many offerings,
and look with favour upon your sacrifices.

⁴May God grant you the desire of your heart,
and fulfil every one of your plans.

⁵May we shout for joy over your deliverance.
May we raise our standards in triumph.

“GOD will fulfil all your petitions.”

⁶Now I know that GOD's anointed will be victorious.
The Holy One will grant him deliverance,
giving strength to his victorious right arm.

⁷Some boast of chariots and horses, but we invoke GOD.
⁸They will waver and fall, but we will stand firm.

⁹Give victory to the king, O GOD.
Answer us when we cry out to you.

It would appear that Jerusalem is under siege. Those living in the city have assembled in the temple to plead with God to come to the aid of the king and the army. Praying this psalm with Jesus, we are reminded of the immense sadness that filled his heart when he saw the destruction toward which his city was hurtling:

‘Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather your children, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused! So be it! Your house will be left to you’ (Luke 13:34-35). recognise your opportunity when God offered it!’” (Luke 19:41-44).



‘As Jesus came in sight of the city he shed tears over it and said, “If only you had understood the message of peace! But, alas, it is hidden from your eyes! Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you – and all because you did not recognise your opportunity when God offered it!”’ (Luke 19:41-44).

The author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us: 'Jesus' power to save is utterly certain, since he is living for ever to intercede for all who come to God through him' (Hebrews 7:25).

As we pray with the psalmist for people and places that are suffering 'time of trouble' (verse 1), Jesus is praying with us.

³May God recall your many offerings,
and look with favour upon your sacrifices.

Paul reminds us: 'I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship' (Romans 12:1).

⁴May God grant you the desire of your heart,
and fulfil every one of your plans.

To sacrifice is to ‘make holy’. It is God who makes holy by drawing us into communion. Our part is to be sensitive to this gravity of grace drawing us, and to yield to it, such that our ‘plans’ are only to allow God’s will to be achieved through us.

Jeremiah 29:11-14

‘Surely I know the plans I have for you, says YHWH, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says YHWH, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says YHWH, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.’

The desire of Jesus' heart (verse 4) is to 'be in the Father's presence' (John 17:5). God granted him this for ever in the Resurrection. Jesus desire is also for us: 'As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us' (John 17:21). Let us pray for this: that everyone will yield to Jesus as he draws us to himself and so to communion with God.

As we pray this psalm with Jesus, he encourages us to get in touch with the deepest desires of our heart. Listen to Jesus praying to his Father to grant these desires, 'so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them' (John 17:26).

⁵“GOD will fulfil all your petitions.”

This is an oracle, assuring us of God's response to our prayer. Did not Jesus say: 'Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you' (Matthew 7:7).

'If two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven' (Matthew 18:19).

'I will do whatever you ask in my name' (John 14:13).

God does not over-ride human freedom, so we may not see God's response. But we must believe that God is responding with Love. It is for us to trust, and to join our love to that of Jesus, remembering that 'love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things' (1 Corinthians 13:7).

Psalm 20

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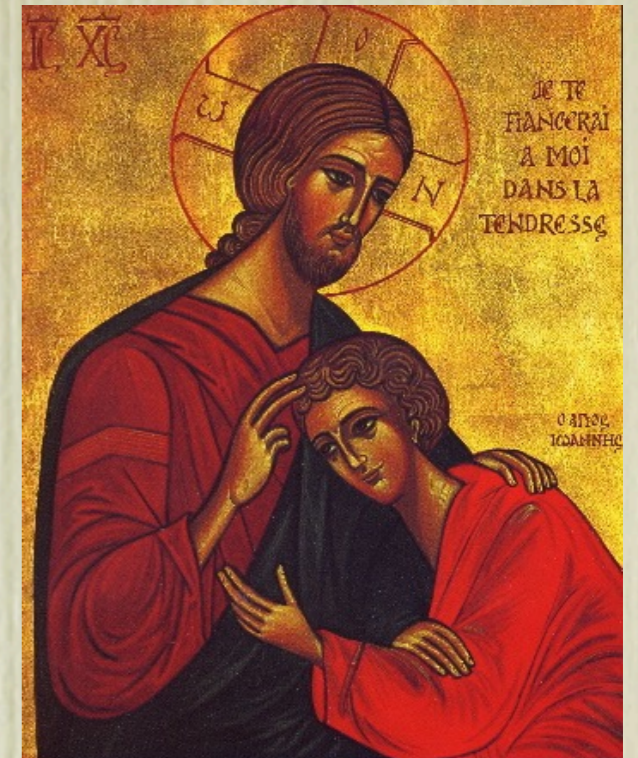
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Answer us when we cry out to you.

Praying Psalm 21 with Jesus



¹O GOD, the king rejoices in *your* power. He celebrates *your* victory.

²You have given him his heart's desire.

You have not refused his prayer.

³You came to meet him, blessing him with success.

You have placed on his head a golden crown.

⁴He asked you for life; you gave it to him
length of days forever and ever.

⁵His glory is great, thanks to your aid;
you have bestowed on him honour and majesty.

⁶You pour out an abundance of blessings upon him.
You have filled him with joy in your presence.

⁷The king trusts in GOD.

Through the kindness of the Most High he shall not waver.

¹³Rise up, O GOD, in your power.

To the sound of instruments we will sing of your mighty Love.

Verses eight to twelve are omitted from the Church's liturgy. Jesus could not pray them; neither should we. We are to oppose evil in ourselves and in others, but Jesus taught us to distinguish between the sin and the sinner, and he insisted on a very different attitude to one's enemies.

*⁸Your left hand will deal with your enemies;
your right hand will deal with your foes.*

*⁹You will make them like a fiery furnace
when suddenly you appear, O GOD.*

[God's anger will devour them, the fire will consume them.]

*¹⁰Destroy their offspring from the earth,
their children from among the human race.*

*¹¹All they do is plan evil against you,
they devise intrigues, but they will not succeed.*

*¹²For you will put them to flight;
you will pick them off with your bows.*

¹O GOD, the king rejoices in *your* power.
He celebrates *your* victory.
²You have given him his heart's desire.
You have not refused his prayer.

In Psalm 20 the people prayed that God would give victory to the king. Here they thank God for answering their prayer. It is God's power that has brought victory (verse 1). It is God who has granted the king his heart's desire (verse 2). Let us join Jesus in giving thanks for God's abundant blessings.

⁴He asked you for life; you gave it to him

We thank God first of all for Jesus, for his life here on earth, and for the life he now enjoys in the eternal embrace of his Father.

‘We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again’ (Romans 6:9).

‘I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever’ (Revelation 1:17-18).

We thank God for the life we enjoy because of our communion with Jesus.

‘The Father, who is the source of life, has made the Son the source of life’ (John 5:26).

‘God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.
Whoever has the Son has eternal life’ (1 John 5:11).

⁵His glory is great ... you have bestowed on him honour and majesty.

We thank God for the beauty radiating on the face and in the heart of Jesus.

‘Father, glorify me in your own presence’ (John 17:5).

‘We see Jesus now crowned with glory and honour because of how he submitted to death’ (Hebrews 2:9).

We thank God ‘because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us’ (Romans 5:5). This Spirit of Love purifies and transforms us till we can pray with Saint Paul: ‘I live, no longer I, it is Christ who lives in me’ (Galatians 2:19). We thank God for sharing Jesus’ beauty with us, and for choosing us to reveal Jesus’ beauty to others.

‘It is the God who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus the Messiah’ (2 Corinthians 4:6).

⁶You have filled him with joy in your presence.

We thank God for the joy Jesus experiences and for our sharing in his joy.

‘I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete’ (John 15:11).

‘You have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you’ (John 16:22).

‘I am coming to you, Father, and I speak these things to share my joy with them to the full’ (John 17:13).

7The king trusts in GOD.

Verse 7 is the central verse of the psalm. The king can remain steadfast because of God's fidelity to God's kindness, God's covenant love. In the company of the Risen Jesus we can pray this psalm, reflecting on God's fidelity that reaches beyond death.

‘In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also’ (John 14:2-3).

‘I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us’ (Romans 8:18).

‘Now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known’ (1 Corinthians 13:12).

‘Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.’
(1 John 3:2).

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”’ (Matthew 5:43-48).

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²You have given him his heart's desire.

You have not refused his prayer.

³You came to meet him, blessing him with success.

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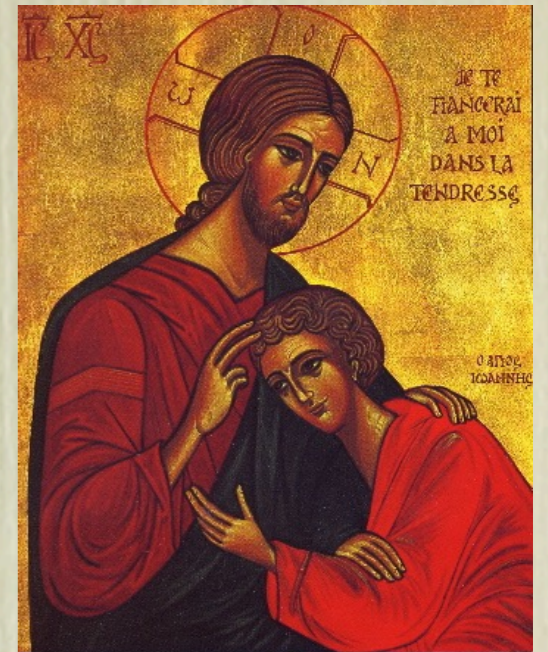
⁷The king trusts in GOD.

Through the kindness of the Most High he shall not waver.

¹³Rise up, O GOD, in your power.

To the sound of instruments we will sing of your mighty Love.

Psalm 21



Praying Psalm 22 with Jesus



“The Crucified and Risen Christ” by Lyn Constable Maxwell, 1994,
All Saints Pastoral Centre, London Colney.

¹My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

How far from saving me, the words I groan!

²I call all day, my God, but you do not answer,
all night long I call and I cannot rest.

³You dwell in the holy temple, you, the praise of Israel.

⁴In you our ancestors trusted; *they* trusted, and you rescued *them*.

⁵To you they cried, and *they* escaped;
they trusted in you, and never in vain.

⁶But here am *I*, more worm than human, scorned and despised.

⁷All who see me deride me, they toss their heads and sneer:

⁸'He relied on GOD, let God save him!

Let God come to his aid if God loves him so much.'

⁹Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you entrusted me to my mother's breasts.

¹⁰Placed on your lap from my birth,
from my mother's womb, You have been my God.

¹¹Come close to me.

Trouble is near and I have no one to help me!

¹²A pack of bulls encircles me, fierce bulls of Bashan close in on me;
¹³for me they open wide their jaws, like ravenous, roaring lions.

¹⁴I am poured out like water; all my bones are out of joint.

My heart is like wax, melting within my breast.

¹⁵My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaw.

You lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶Dogs hunt me; a gang of villains closes me in.

They tear at my hands and feet, determined to take my life.

¹⁷I can count all my bones. They glare at me and gloat.

¹⁸They divide up my clothes, and cast lots for my robe.

¹⁹But you, O GOD, do not leave me.

O my strength, come quickly to my aid.

²⁰Rescue me from the sword, my life from the mauling of the dogs!

²¹Save me from the lion's jaws, from the horns of the wild bulls.

²²and I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters;

in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.

¹My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?

How far from saving me, the words I groan!

²I call all day, my God, but you do not answer,
all night long I call and I cannot rest.

The cry is answered only by God's silence: Notice the repetition of 'my God'. Though the feeling is of being forsaken, a trusting intimacy persists.

⁴In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you rescued them.
⁵To you they cried, and they escaped;
they trusted in you, and never in vain.

We think of God's words to Moses when he appeared to him in the burning bush: 'I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians' (Exodus 3:7-8). God heard their cry. This is echoed in the songs that rise up to God from the sanctuary, celebrating God's saving action in Israel's history.

³You dwell in the holy temple, you, the praise of Israel.

Why is God not hearing his cry?

⁶But here am I, more worm than human, scorned and despised.
⁷All who see me deride me, they toss their heads and sneer:
⁸‘He relied on GOD, let God save him!
Let God come to his aid if God loves him so much.’

The psalmist is ‘scorned and despised.

So it is for Jesus: ‘Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads ... ‘He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to’ (Matthew 27:39,43).

⁹Yet it was you who took me from the womb;
you entrusted me to my mother's breasts.
¹⁰Placed on your lap from my birth,
from my mother's womb, my God is you. [Eli atta] [Elia ta?]
¹¹Come close to me.
Trouble is near and I have no one to help me!

The psalmist recalls the intimacy he knew in his childhood.

Listen to Jesus as he makes this psalm his own.

¹²A pack of bulls encircles me, fierce bulls of Bashan close in on me;
¹³for me they open wide their jaws, like ravenous, roaring lions.

¹⁴I am poured out like water; all my bones are out of joint.

My heart is like wax, melting within my breast.

¹⁵My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaw.

You lay me in the dust of death.

In his pain he seems to see God, now close, but in the circle of his enemies. This is the God who brought him forth from the womb (verse 9). This is his most excruciating pain.

¹⁶They tear at my hands and feet

Jesus is nailed to the cross (John 19:18; 20:25).

In our prayer we ‘look on the one we have pierced’ (John 19:37).

¹⁸They divide up my clothes, and cast lots for my robe.

So it is with Jesus: ‘When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” John goes on to quote this psalm: ‘This was to fulfil what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots” (John 19:23-24).

The psalmist utters a final plea to God, promising that if God comes to his aid, he will witness to God's love in the congregation.

¹⁹But you, O GOD, do not leave me.

O my strength, come quickly to my aid.

²⁰Rescue me from the sword, my life from the mauling of the dogs!

²¹Save me from the lion's jaws, from the horns of the wild bulls.

²²and I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.

People are mocking the psalmist, who is calling on God but seemingly in vain. He remembers what God did in reply to the cry of his ancestors. He remembers, too, his own earlier experiences of intimacy with God. Desperate, he describes his situation, and pleads with God, promising to acknowledge God's response in the public assembly.

It is here that the psalm takes a sudden turn. The psalm which began 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me' (verse 1), now explodes in wave after wave of praise. Either the psalmist's prayer has been answered, or we are witnessing a profound act of faith in God who always hears the cry of the poor. Mark has pointed us to Psalm 22 with this, too, in mind, for the crucifying of Jesus is not the final word.

We hear Jesus say: 'Father, into your hands I commend my spirit' (Luke 23:46), and know that God has taken him for ever into God's loving embrace.



I. Praise from the Assembly

²³Let your praise ring out, you who revere GOD!

Give glory to God, all you children of Jacob!

Stand in awe, all you children of Israel!

²⁴For God did not despise or scorn the condition of this wretch.

God's love remained fixed on me, hearing my cry.

²⁵Yours, O God, is my praise in the great congregation.

My vows I will pay before your faithful.

²⁶The poor eat and are satisfied.

Those who seek GOD utter praise. May they never lose heart.

2. Praise from the Nations

²⁷All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to GOD.

All the families of nations will worship GOD

²⁸who rules over the nations.

3. Praise from the Dead

²⁹To God, indeed, shall bow, all who go down to the dust.

And I, too, with all my being, if God preserves me.

4. Praise from Future Generations

³⁰My descendants will worship;

future generations will be told about GOD,

³¹and will proclaim God's justice to a people yet unborn:

'Look what God has done!'

Let us pray this psalm thinking also of ourselves and of our world. Let us ask Jesus for a share in his faith, his trust and his love, confident that God does hear the cry of the poor, as we renew our faith in God's will. The failure of the authorities to heed God's inspiration meant that Jesus was crucified. His cry did not mean he was saved from crucifixion. But, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews writes: 'In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission' (Hebrews 5:7).

Jesus' prayer was heard, for God embraced him from the cross and took him to the goal of all our lives: eternal communion with God in the risen life.

Psalm 22

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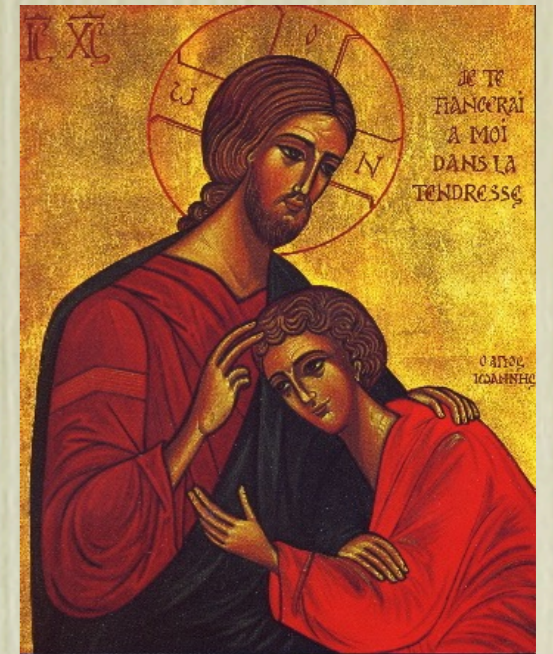
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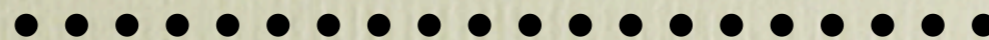
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³⁰My descendants will worship;
future generations will be told about GOD,
³¹and will proclaim God's justice to a people yet unborn:
'Look what God has done!'