

22. Psalms 64-67

Praying Psalm 64 with Jesus



¹Hear my cry, O God. Listen to my complaint.
I am afraid. Please keep me safe.

²Hide me from the secret plots of the wicked,
from the scheming of those set on evil.

³They sharpen their tongues like swords.
Like arrows they aim their cutting words.

⁴They ambush the innocent.
They shoot suddenly and have no fear.

⁵They hold fast to their evil purpose.
They talk of laying hidden snares:

⁶‘Who can see us?’ they say,
‘Our scheme is cunningly conceived.’

⁷It is God, who searches the mind
and knows the depths of the heart.
¹⁰The just rejoice and find refuge in GOD.
The upright of heart sing praise.

Omitted

⁷*Suddenly they are struck
by arrows shot at them by God.*
⁸*Because of their tongue God brings them to ruin.*
All who see them shake their heads in horror.
⁹*Everyone is afraid.*
They ponder what God has done.

Since ‘God searches the mind and knows the depths of the heart’ (verse 7), the psalmist is confident that God is bringing about the defeat of those who ‘hold fast to their evil purpose’ (verse 5). He encourages us to find refuge in God, and to continue to ‘rejoice’ and ‘sing praise’ (verse 10).

Psalm 64

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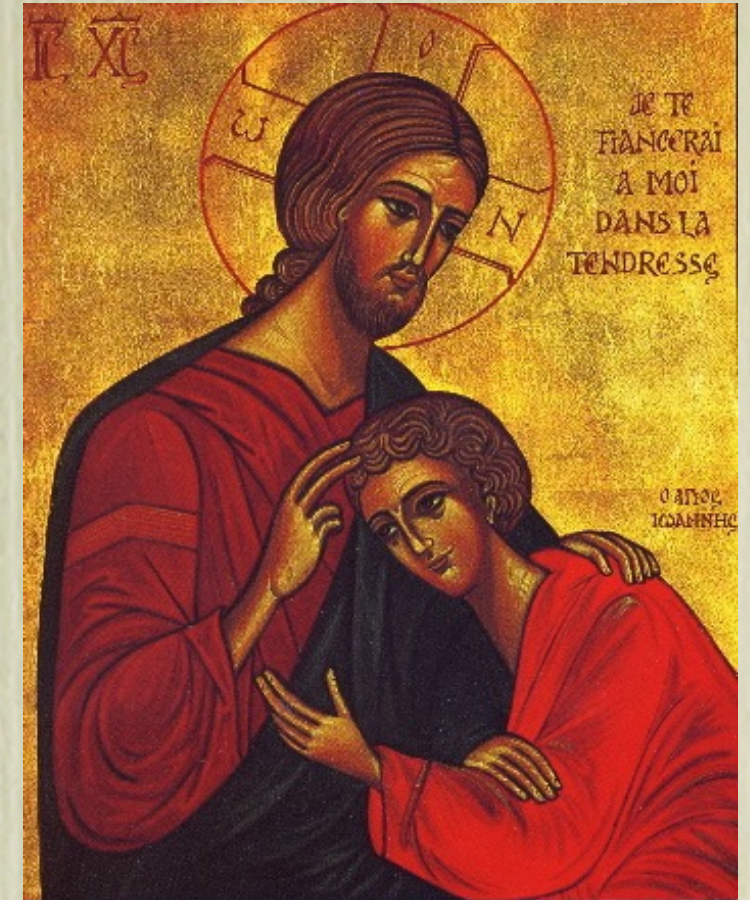
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Praying Psalm 65 with Jesus



The psalmist is aware of how blessed he is to be able to join the assembly as they approach God in the temple (verse 4). The occasion is probably the Day of Atonement (see Leviticus 16).

¹To you our praise is due, to you who dwell in Zion.

²We make our vows to you, our God, to you who answer our prayer.

³We come to you, all of us, with our burden of guilt.

Our transgressions overwhelm us, but you continue to pardon.

⁴Blessed and happy are those whom you bring near to live in your courts.

We are filled with the goodness of your house,
with the graces of your holy temple.

⁵By awesome deeds you answer us with justice, O God our saviour.

You are the hope of the ends of the earth and of the far distant isles.

⁶By your power you establish the mountains,
you who are girded with might.

⁷You silence the roaring of the seas,
the roaring of their waves, and the tumult of the peoples.

⁸Those who live at earth's farthest bounds
are overawed by your signs.

The lands of sunrise and sunset you fill with your joy.

⁹You tend the land, providing it with water.
How wonderful the harvest!

Your river in heaven brims over to give the earth what it needs.

¹⁰You water abundantly the furrows, levelling their ridges,
softening them with showers and blessing their growth.

¹¹You crown the year with your bounty.
Your furrows overflow with abundance.

¹²The pastures of the wilderness flourish.

The hills are girded with joy,

¹³the meadows are clothed with flocks,

the valleys are decked with grain.

They shout for joy. Yes, they sing.

³We come to you, all of us, with our burden of guilt.

Our transgressions overwhelm us, but you continue to pardon.

The psalmist speaks of the ‘burden of guilt’ (‘awôn). This affects the sinner. It also affects the community. He is confident that we are all welcome to approach God.. Our ‘burden of guilt’ is no reason to stay away.

‘Our transgressions (pesha’) overwhelm us’. pesha’ denotes a break in relationships caused by an act that is so serious as to provoke outrage and threaten serious sanctions. In regard to God it denotes a rebellion that breaks communion – a break that God wants to mend.

At the heart of Israel's faith is the belief that GOD 'forgives guilt ('awôn) and transgression (pesha') and sin (hâtâ)' (Exodus 34:7).

hâtâ' is the word used most frequently in the psalms for 'sin', though it is not used in this psalm. It denotes an offence committed against someone with whom one is in an established relationship. This applies most significantly to our covenant relationship with GOD. It covers not only the offence but also the consequences for the sinner and for whatever and whoever it is that he has polluted through his sin.

The psalms have a rich and varied vocabulary for pardoning sin.

They plead with GOD to ‘**remove**’ it (Psalm 32:5);

to ‘**look away from**’ it (Psalm 51:9);

to ‘**cover it over**’ (Psalm 32:1);

to ‘**rub it out**’ (Psalm 109:14);

to ‘**wash it away**’ (Psalm 51:4);

to ‘**purge it away**’ (Psalm 51:7);

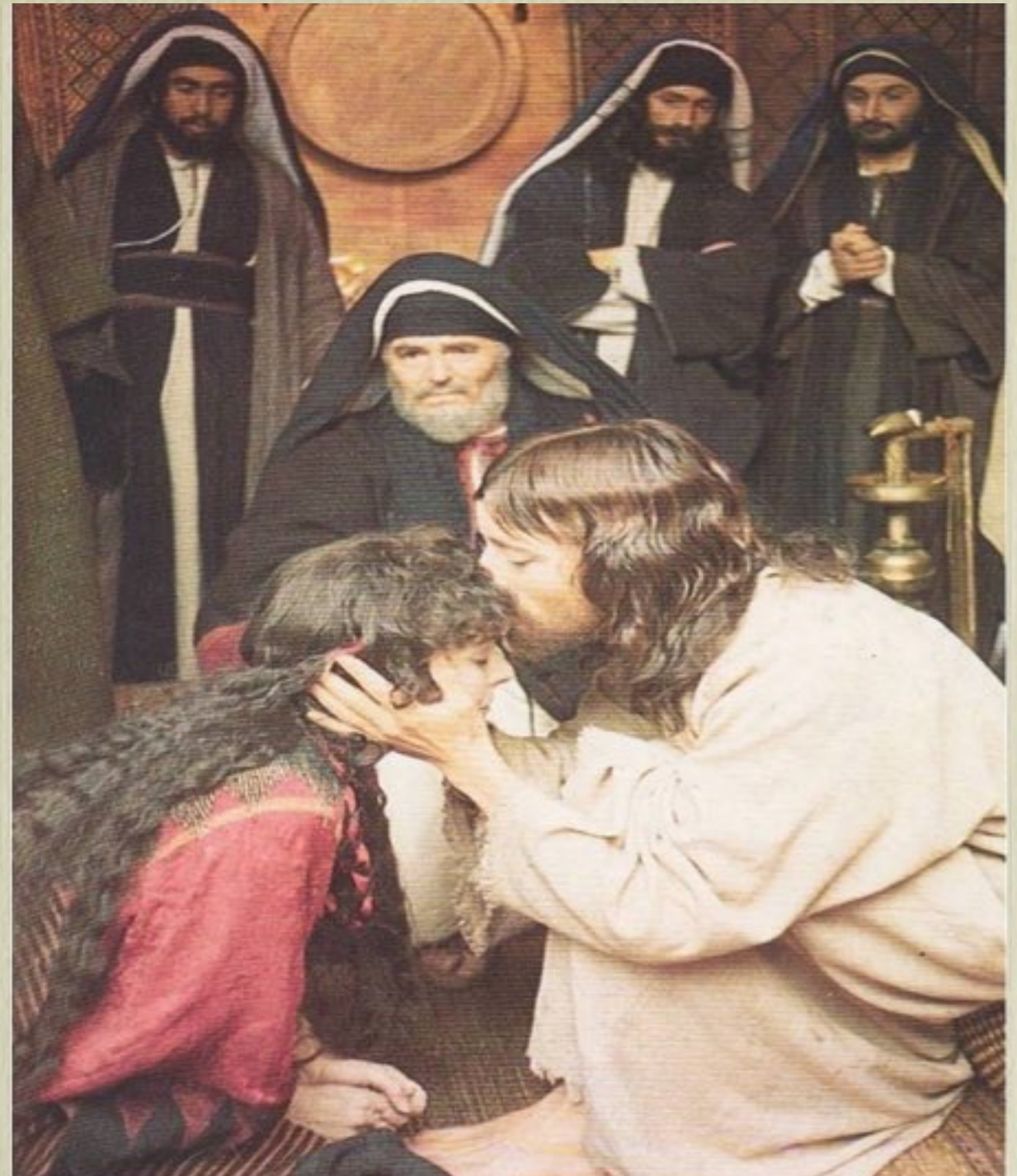
to ‘**not remember**’ it (Psalm 25:7).

Here in Psalm 65 the psalmist is confident that God ‘**continues to pardon**’ (Hebrew כָּפַר, verse 3). כָּפַר is used for ‘pardon’ in only four psalms: here, and in Psalms 49:7, 78:38 and 79:9. It means ‘to cover’ and the reference is to the Day of Atonement when the high priest enters the Holy of Holies and approaches the ‘mercy-seat’, the golden ‘cover’ (Hebrew כַּפֹּרֶת) of the ark, God’s throne where God has chosen to dwell invisibly among his chosen people. Sin cannot be in the presence of God. As the high priest approaches the ‘cover’ with the sins of the people, they are consumed in the fire of God’s merciful forgiveness.

When we feel paralysed, unable to move forward, let us pray that, like the paralysed man, we will have friends who have faith, who will take us to Jesus, and we will hear him say: 'your sins are forgiven' (Mark 2:5).



When others know of our sins, and we cannot escape our reputation, let us not despair of being able to love. Let us still go to Jesus and hear him say: 'your sins must have been forgiven, or you could not love so much' (Luke 7:47). Let us remember that Jesus came to call sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13). He poured out his life in love 'for the forgiveness of sins' (Matthew 26:28). Let us hear him pray from the cross: 'Father, forgive them. They do not know what they are doing' (Luke 23:34).



Let us take to heart Paul's exhortation: 'Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you' (Ephesians 4:32) – an exhortation included in the prayer Jesus taught his disciples: 'Father, forgive us our sins, as we ourselves forgive anyone indebted to us' (Luke 11:4).

⁴Blessed and happy are those whom you bring near
to live in your courts.

We are filled with the goodness of your house,
with the graces of your holy temple.

The psalmist is filled with gratitude that he has been chosen
to ‘live in God’s courts’, where he is ‘filled with the goodness
of God’s house, with the graces of God’s holy temple.’

As we pray this psalm with Jesus, we reflect on Jesus’ words:
‘You did not choose me but I chose you’ (John 15:16). We call
to mind the many graces we have received. In the context of
being in ‘God’s house’ we think especially of the gift of the
Eucharist.

⁹You tend the land, providing it with water.

How wonderful the harvest!

Your river in heaven brims over to give the earth what it needs.

¹⁰You water abundantly the furrows, levelling their ridges,
softening them with showers and blessing their growth.

¹¹You crown the year with your bounty.

Your furrows overflow with abundance.

¹²The pastures of the wilderness flourish. The hills are girded with joy,

¹³the meadows are clothed with flocks,

the valleys are decked with grain. They shout for joy. Yes, they sing.

In one of the most beautifully descriptive pieces of biblical poetry, the psalmist invites us to look at the ‘miracle’ of the seasons and the harvests. God is the Lord of the universe and of history and of nature: ‘the lands of sunrise and sunset you fill with your joy’ (verse 8).

They shout for joy. Yes, they sing.

At the Last Supper Jesus spoke about going to God (John 13:33 and 14:4) and returning to his disciples (John 14:3, 18). He went on to say: 'If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father' (John 14:28). He asks them to rise above their sadness and to think of what his going means to him. He is returning to the one he loves.



Jesus wants us to believe that this return is good for us. Throughout the whole Gospel Jesus has been drawing people to himself only so that he might share with them the life of the one he calls 'Father.' From his communion with his Father he is able to send his Spirit to us (John 7:39; 14:15-17). He is able to come to us with his Father (John 14:23). The 'joy' which we are promised is the joy experienced by the Baptist when he heard the voice of the bridegroom (John 3:29), the joy of those who share Jesus' mission (John 4:36). This joy is a fruit of the Spirit (John 20:20-21). It is the joy of having Christ living in us (Galatians 5:22). It is the joy of knowing that we are 'heirs to the promises' (Galatians 3:29), the joy of experiencing the love of our brothers and sisters in the faith.

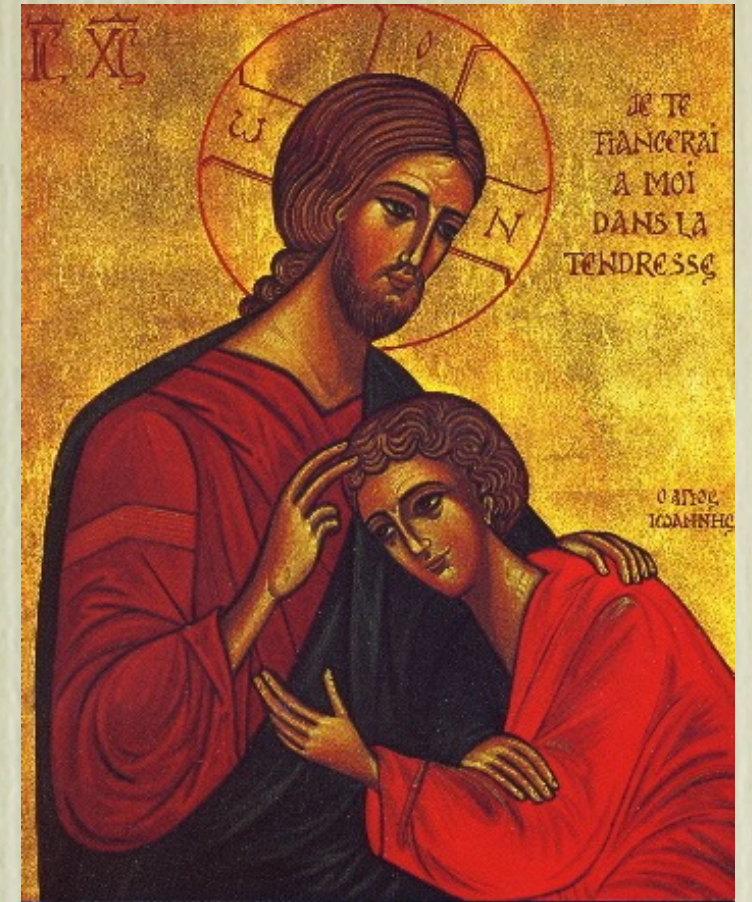
Paul exhorted the Christians in Thessalonica to ‘rejoice always’ (1 Thessalonians 5:16). The joy which Paul wishes for them is the joy that fills the heart of Jesus, whose desire it is ‘that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete’ (John 15:11). It is the happiness of those who live by the beatitudes (see Matthew 5:3-12): those who recognise their dependence upon God and who look to their Father for everything; the joy of the gentle who sense the sacred at the heart of every situation; the joy of those whose hearts have been broken, but who, through the pain, have learned compassion; the joy of those who hunger and thirst for justice; the joy of those who show mercy to others; the joy of the pure in heart who see God; the joy of those who work for peace; the joy of those who share in the sufferings of Jesus and who continue to give themselves in love.



It is the joy of encountering Jesus through his Spirit. The encounter is always a surprise, as filled with dread as it is with joy. It is not an experience to which we can cling. Our faith renewed, we are encouraged to walk in the night, knowing that ‘the light shines in the darkness’ (John 1:5). The ‘Light of the world’ (John 8:12) is walking with us. Our faith is ‘a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts’ (2 Peter 1:19).

Psalm 65

- ¹To you our praise is due,
to you who dwell in Zion.
- ²We make our vows to you, our God,
to you who answer our prayer.
- ³We come to you, all of us,
with our burden of guilt.
Our transgressions overwhelm us,
but you continue to pardon.
- ⁴Blessed and happy are those
whom you bring near to live in your courts.
We are filled with the goodness of your house,
with the graces of your holy temple.
- ⁵By awesome deeds you answer us with justice, O God our saviour.
You are the hope of the ends of the earth and of the far distant isles.



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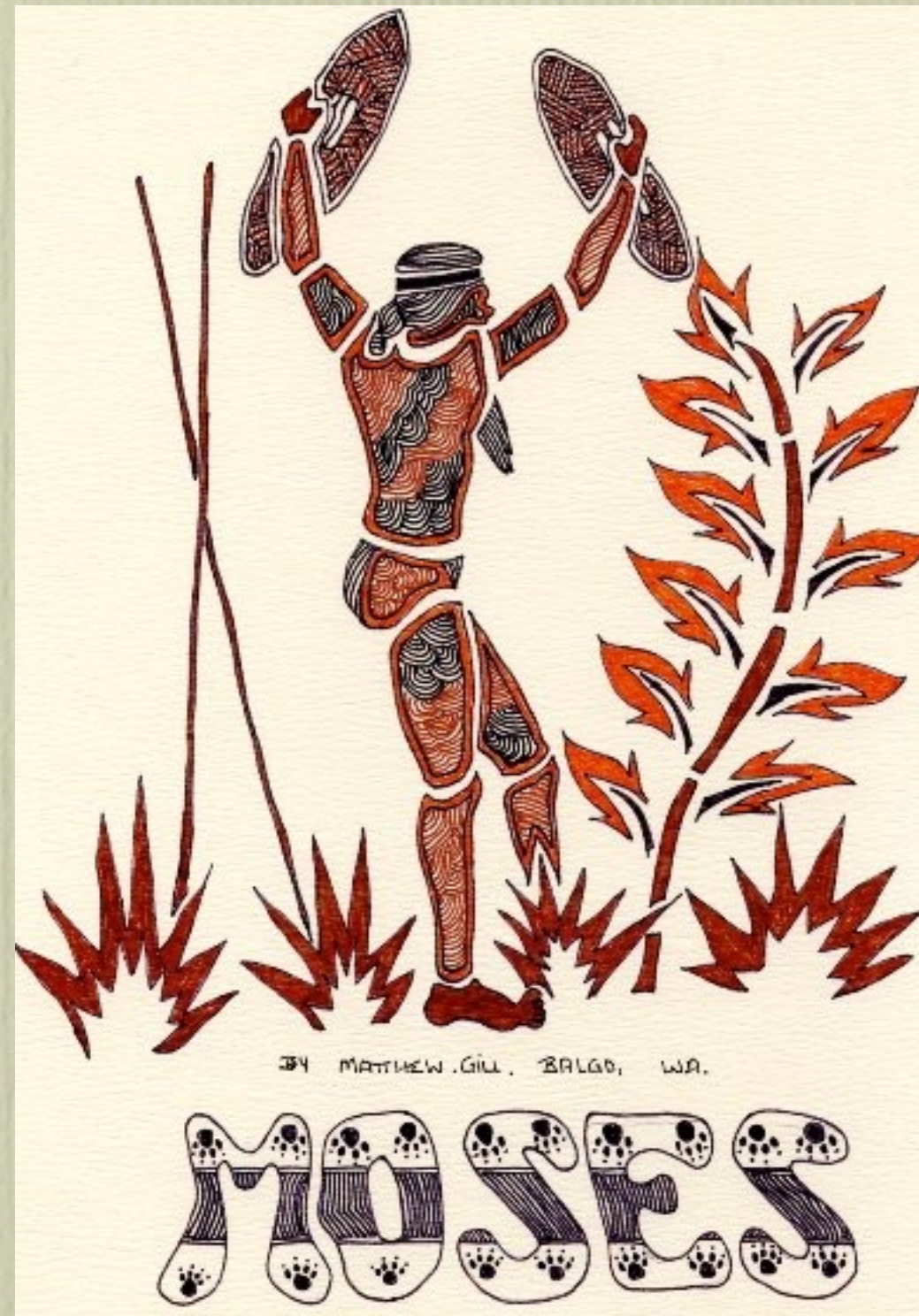
The hills are girded with joy,

¹³the meadows are clothed with flocks,

the valleys are decked with grain.

They shout for joy. Yes, they sing.

Praying Psalm 66 with Jesus



¹Cry out with joy all the earth,
²make music and sing of God's glory. Give God glorious praise!
³Sing, 'How tremendous your deeds!
Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.
⁴Before you all the earth will bow, praising you in song.'

⁵Come and see God's wonders, God's tremendous deeds among us.
⁶It was God who formed dry land in the sea
to enable the people to cross.
⁷Let our joy be in God who reigns for ever with might.
God keeps watch on all the nations.
Let rebels not raise their heads!

⁸Bless our God, you peoples. Let praise ring out in honour of God,
⁹who has kept alive our spirits, and kept our feet from stumbling.
¹²We passed through fire and water; but you brought us relief.

¹³I come into your house with offerings, animals from my herd,
¹⁴to carry out the promises I made you,
when I found myself in trouble.

¹⁵I will offer you burnt offerings,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams, bulls and goats.

¹⁶All you who revere ['fear'] God come and hear,
and I will proclaim what God has done for me.

¹⁷I cried aloud, praising God.

¹⁹And God listened, heeding the words of my prayer.

²⁰Blessed are you, O God, for you did not reject my plea,
or remove from me your covenant love.

Omitted

¹⁰You test us, O God, you try us like silver.

¹¹You imprison us, you lay burdens on our backs.

¹²You let others beat us down.

The assumption behind these verses is that God controls everything that happens, including the ‘trials’ that we experience.

¹⁸If I had cherished evil in my heart,

God would not have listened.*

Jesus showed us that God listens to the cry of sinners, even of those ‘who cherish evil in their hearts.’ God listens, and offers forgiveness. Of course, to receive what God offers requires a change on our part. Love is never forced upon us. Though forgiveness is unconditionally offered, it is conditionally received – conditional upon our welcoming of grace, and our repentance.

The psalmist is inviting the assembly to join him in thanking God who has heard his plea and brought him safely through a period of trial. The assembly calls on the whole world to join in thanking the God of the universe, who redeemed his people and who answers prayer. The call to worship reminds us of Paul's hymn: 'At the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus the Messiah is Lord, to the glory of God the Father' (Philippians 2:10-11).

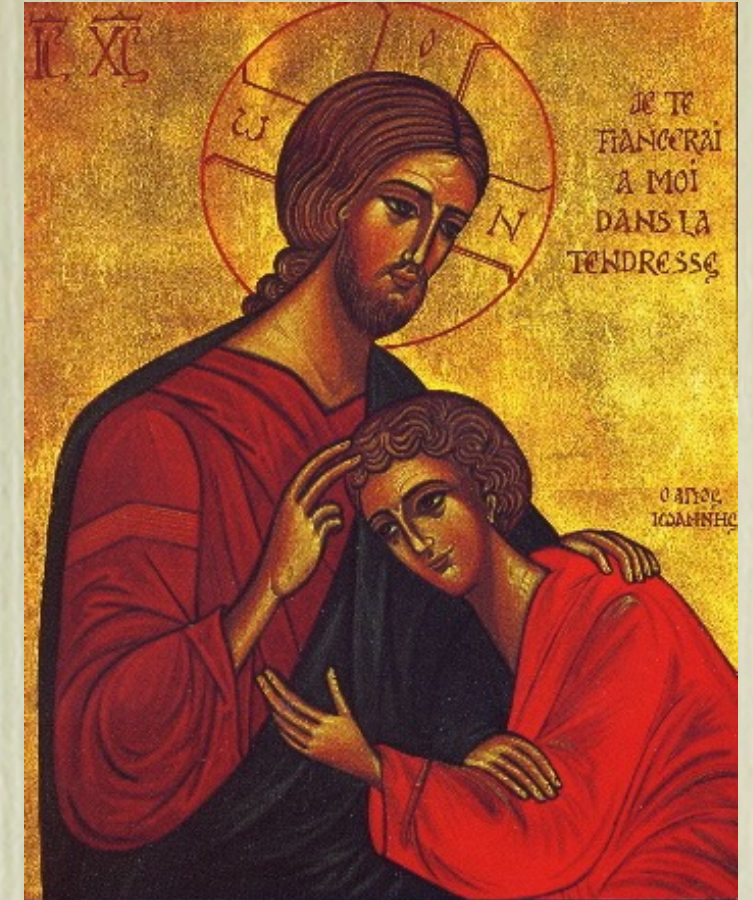
We are invited to praise God, ‘**who has kept alive our spirits**’ (verse 9). Paul assures us: ‘Even when we were dead through our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved’ (Ephesians 2:5).

‘**We passed through fire and water, but you brought us relief**’ (verse 12). During their mission in Galatia, Paul and Barnabas ‘strengthened the souls of the disciples and encouraged them to continue in the faith, saying, “It is through many persecutions that we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

As we pray this psalm with Jesus, we are being encouraged, whatever trials we are going through, to praise God: ‘**Blessed are you, O God, for you did not reject my plea, or remove from me your covenant love**’ (verse 20).

Psalm 66

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Praying Psalm 67 with Jesus



¹O God be gracious to us and bless us,
show us the radiance of your face,
²that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among the nations.

³*Let the nations praise you, O God;* (Refrain see verses 5 and 8)
let all the nations praise you.

⁴May the whole world be glad
and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity,
you govern the nations of the earth.

⁵Let the nations praise you, O God; (Refrain see verses 3 and 8)
let all the nations praise you.

⁶The earth has yielded its harvest.
Our God is blessing us.

⁷O God continue your blessing.
Let the whole world revere you.

⁸Let the nations praise you, O God; (Refrain see verses 3 and 5)
let all the nations praise you.

The psalmist wants the whole world to experience God's gracious providence and to respond in praise. Especially notable is the universal ('catholic'), all-embracing, scope of the prayer. Praying this psalm with Jesus, we gaze on him, for it is in Jesus that God '**shows the radiance of God's face**' (verse 1). When Philip asked to see God, Jesus replied: 'If you see me you see the Father' (John 14:9).

It was Jesus who made known upon earth God's graciousness and '**saving power**', and so revealed the radiance of God's face.

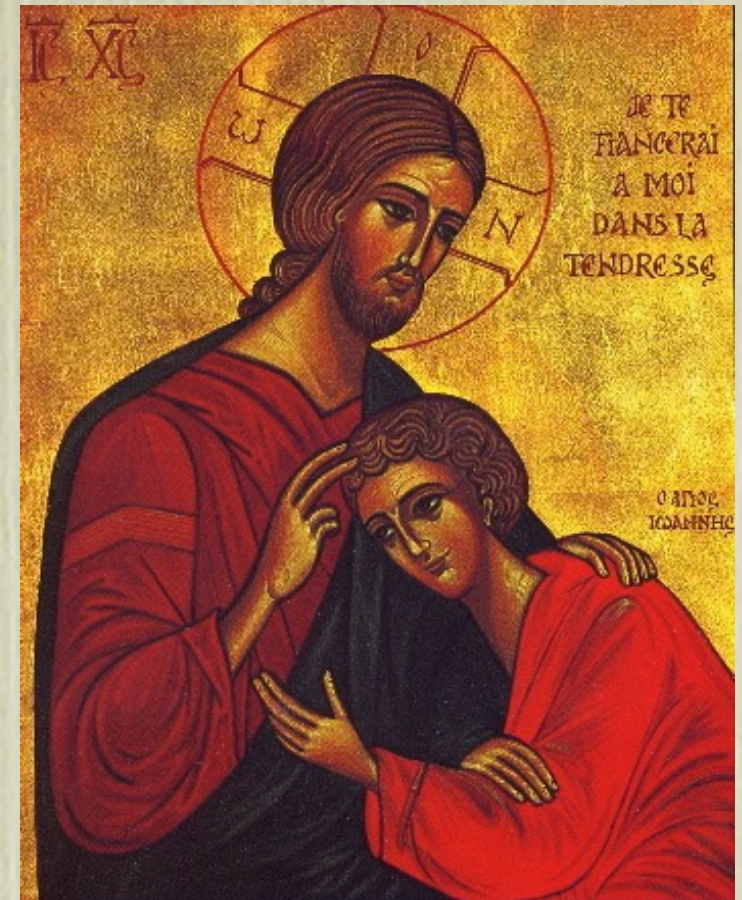
Paul prays: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 1:3).

Psalm 67

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