

43. Psalms 132-135

Praying Psalm 132 with Jesus



Psalm 132 is a ceremonial chant recalling the transfer of the ark to David's city (2 Samuel 6) and then to the temple (1 Kings 8). It recalls the link between David's desire to build God a house and God's promise to build a house (that is, a dynasty) for David (2 Samuel 7).

The transfer of the Ark to Jerusalem is being recalled, and perhaps ceremonially re-enacted. 'Ephrathah' (verse 6) is the region of Bethlehem, just south of Jerusalem (see 1 Chronicles 4:4). David came from this area. 'Yearim' (verse 6) refers to Kiriath-yearim where the ark was installed after being captured back from the Philistines (1 Samuel 6:21 - 7:2).

¹O GOD, remember David
and the many hardships he endured;
²and how he swore an oath to you,
O Mighty One of Jacob:

³'I will not enter my house
or lie down on my bed;
⁴I will not close my eyes, nor will I sleep,
⁵till I find a place for GOD,
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.'

⁶We heard of the ark in Ephrathah;
we found it in the fields of Yearim.

⁷'Let us go to GOD's house; let us kneel at GOD's footstool.'

⁸Rise up, O GOD, and go to your resting place,
you and the ark of your might.

⁹Let your priests be properly attired,
and your faithful shout for joy.

¹⁰For your servant David's sake
do not deny audience to your anointed one.

¹¹You once swore to David
and you do not break your word:
'A son of yours I will set on your throne.

¹²If your heirs keep my covenant
and the decrees that I have made,
their sons also, for ever more,
will sit on your throne.'

¹³GOD has chosen Zion for his residence:

¹⁴'This is my resting place,

I have chosen to live here forever.

¹⁵I will bless it abundantly.

Its poor will have food.

¹⁶Its priests I will clothe with salvation.

Its faithful will shout for joy.

¹⁷Here David's stock will flower.

I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.

¹⁸His enemies I will cover with disgrace,

but on him the royal crown will shine.'

The 'faithful' (verse 9; Hebrew ḥasidim) are those who welcome God's covenant love (Hebrew ḥesed) and are faithful to the covenant.

Verses 11-12 give a powerful affirmation of faith at a time when there was no king in Judah. God's promises are always unconditional. However they are effective only when welcomed - and this involves an 'if' – 'If your heirs keep my covenant and the decrees that I have made' (verse 12).

The writers of the New Testament saw this promise realised in Jesus, the son of David. In his address on the Feast of Pentecost, Peter stated: 'Since he was a prophet, David knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne ... Let the entire house of Israel know that God has made Jesus both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified' (Acts 2:30, 36).

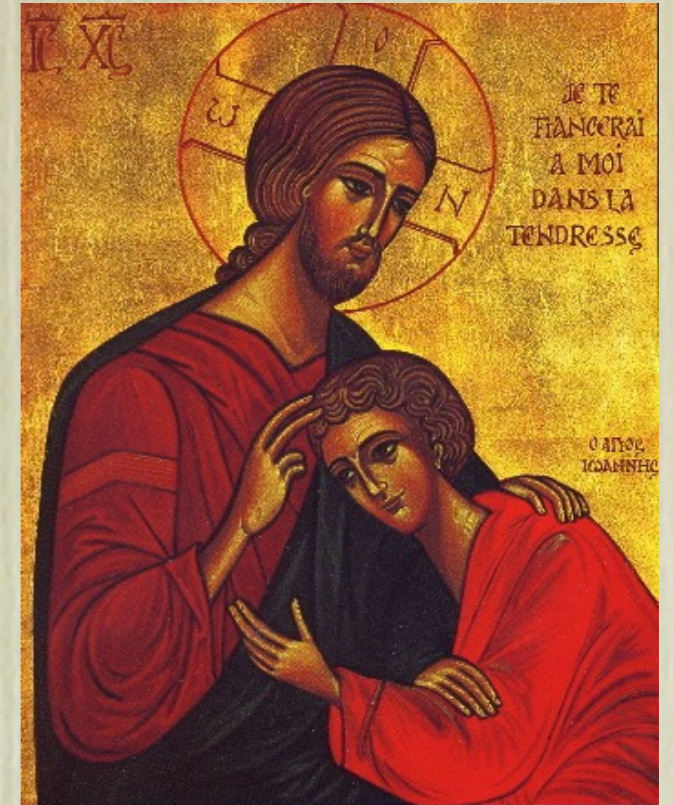
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Praying Psalm 133 with Jesus



¹How good and pleasant it is to live in communion!

²It is like precious oil poured on Aaron's head,
running down his beard and the collar of his robe.

³It is like the dew of Hermon,
falling on the mountains of Zion.

There GOD gives blessing: life for ever.

Psalm 133 is a celebration of family, of nation, of cultic community. As Christians we pray it with Jesus, thinking of the Church of the Risen Christ. Is the psalmist expressing longing for the reunification of northern and southern kingdoms? (see Isaiah 11:13 and Ezekiel 37:22-23). He is expressing the importance and joy of unity in the community.

Praying this psalm with Jesus we think of Paul's beautiful words to the Christian community in Philippi: "If then there is any appeal in Christ, any consolation from love, any communion in the Spirit, any movements of compassion and feelings of love, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one soul and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition. Do not strive after or seek to find your value in things that are worthless, but in humility regard others above yourselves, so that not everyone is focused on themselves, but each is looking to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 2:1-5).

²It is like precious oil poured on Aaron's head,
running down his beard and the collar of his robe.

The fragrance of the 'precious oil' passes from the priestly mediator right through to the assembly. The collar of the priest's robe is embroidered with twelve precious stones for the tribes of Israel.

Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall Paul's words: 'Through us Christ spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him' (2 Corinthians 2:14).

Our thoughts as we pray this psalm are on the Church, the Body of Christ: 'I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose' (1 Corinthians 1:10).

'Love never stops caring. Love always acts in a kind way.

Love does not act out of jealousy or envy.

Love does not boast, or behave in an arrogant way.

Love does not act indecently, or insist on its own way.

Love does not give way to irritation or brood over wrongs.

Love takes no pleasure in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

Love has space enough

to hold and to bear everything and everyone.

Love believes all things, hopes all things,

and endures whatever comes.

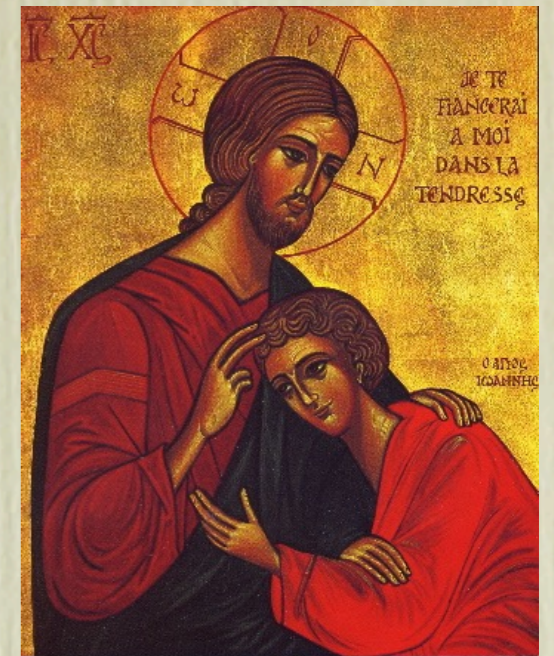
Love does not come to an end' (1 Corinthians 13:4-7).

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Praying Psalm 134 with Jesus



This is the last of the group of psalms (120-134) which bear the title 'A Song of Ascents.' The pilgrims have reached their destination, 'GOD's house' (verse 1), 'the holy place' (verse 2). They can rest secure because God is guarding them (see Psalm 121).

¹Come, bless GOD
you who minister in GOD's house,
who stand watch throughout the night.

²Lift up your hands in the holy place, and praise GOD.

³I pray that GOD, the Maker of heaven and earth,
will bless you from Zion.

¹Come, bless GOD

When we are invited to 'bless God' we are being invited to praise and thank God for the blessings that God showers upon us. Praying this psalm with Jesus we recall the welcome offered in Jesus' parable of the Final Judgment: 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Matthew 25:34).

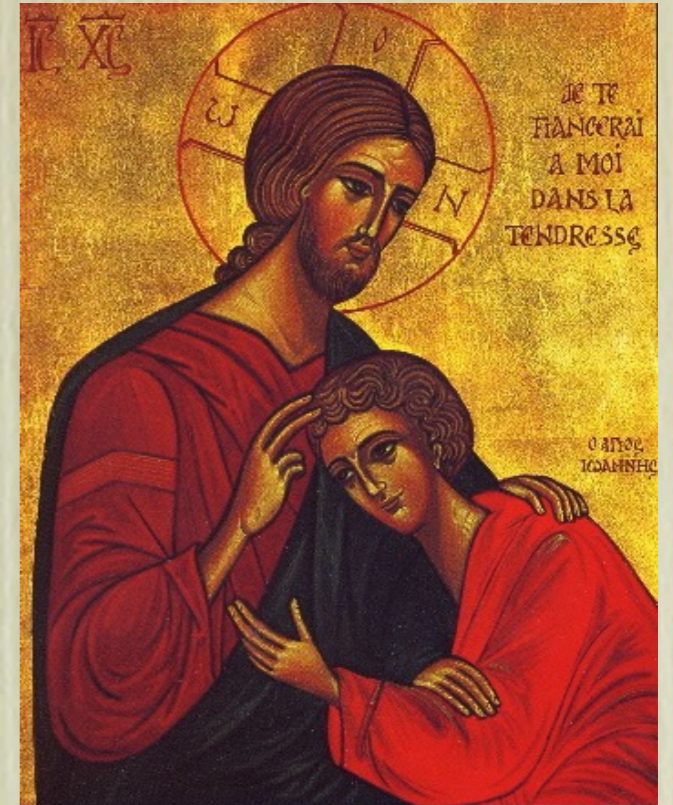
We recall also Paul's words: 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 1:3).

Psalm 134

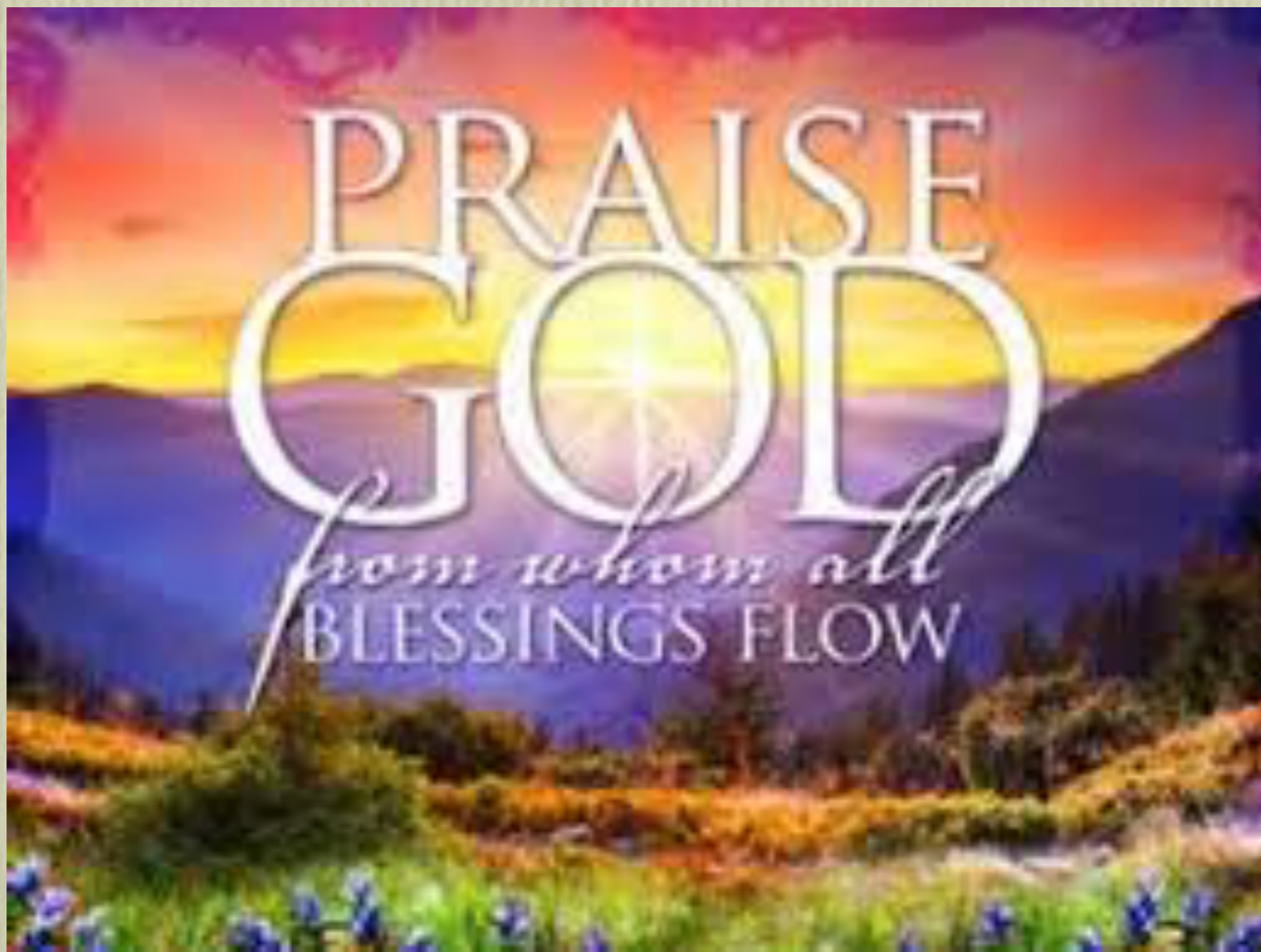
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Praying Psalm 135 with Jesus



¹Praise GOD (Alleluia!), O servants of GOD,

²you who stand in the house of GOD,
in the courts of the house of our God.

³Praise GOD who is good;
sing to our beautiful GOD,

⁴who has chosen Israel as a treasured possession.

⁵I know GOD is great;

our God* (יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ), the greatest of the gods.

⁶Whatever GOD wills GOD does,

in heaven and on earth, and in the depths of the sea.

⁷GOD summons the clouds from the ends of the earth;

releasing lightning and rain, and wind from their storehouse.

The traditional legend

⁸It was GOD who struck down the first born of Egypt,
humans and animals alike;
⁹who sent signs and wonders into your midst, O Egypt,
against Pharaoh and all his servants;

Verses 8-12 repeat the classical account of the miraculous beginnings of Ancient Israel. The account of GOD striking down the firstborn of Egypt is found in Exodus 12:29. It is a dramatic way of stating that God's chosen people (God's firstborn) are the Israelites, not the Egyptians.

¹⁰who struck down many nations
and killed mighty kings,

¹¹Sihon, king of the Amorites, Og, king of Bashan,
and all the kings of Canaan;

¹²who gave their land to Israel for them to possess.

The story of the war between the Israelites and King Sihon is found in the Book of Numbers 21:21-32 and in Deuteronomy 2:26-37. The story of the war with King Og is found in the Book of Numbers 21:33-35 and in Deuteronomy 3:1-7.

We are dealing here with legend, not history.

The Exodus occurred most probably in the Late Bronze period (13th century BC). The Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein and the Israeli historian Neil Silberman in their book *The Bible Unearthed* (The Free Press, 2001) write: 'Excavations at Tel Heshban south of Amman showed that there was no Late Bronze city there, not even a small village ... The plateau of Transjordan was very sparsely inhabited in the Late Bronze Age. In fact most parts of the region, including Edom, which is mentioned as a state ruled by a king in the biblical narrative, were not even inhabited by a sedentary population at that time. To put it simply, archaeology has shown that there were no kings of Edom there for the Israelites to meet' (page 64).

GOD did not 'strike down the firstborn of Egypt', nor did GOD 'strike down many nations and kill many kings.' GOD did not strike down 'all the kings of Canaan and give their land to Israel for them to possess.' In using this language, the psalmist is making sure that all credit for the founding of Israel must go to GOD. Unfortunately the cost for doing so is to distort the image of God as a warrior warlord. This is not Jesus' image of God, and so fails as Christian prayer.

¹³Your name, O GOD, endures for ever,
your renown, throughout all ages.

¹⁴You vindicate your people,
and comfort your servants.

¹⁵The gods of the nations are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.

¹⁶They have mouths, but they do not speak;
eyes, but they do not see;

¹⁷ears, but they do not hear,
nostrils, but they do not breathe.

¹⁸Those who make them become like them,
as do all who put their trust in them.

¹⁹House of Israel, bless GOD!

House of Aaron, bless GOD!

²⁰House of Levi, bless GOD!

You that revere ['fear'] GOD, bless GOD!

²¹Blessed from Zion be GOD, who resides in Jerusalem.

Praise GOD! (Alleluia!)

Psalm 135 is an invitation to the assembly to praise GOD, the Creator and Liberator of his people Israel. It abounds in quotations and traditional statements of faith.

Praying it as Christians we think of the risen Jesus: 'He was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord' (Romans 1:4).

'He must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet' (1 Corinthians 15:25).

⁴GOD has chosen Israel as a treasured possession.

‘Treasured possession’ translates the Hebrew segulla, which occurs only here in the psalms and only a handful of times in the Hebrew Bible. The classical text is in the Book of Exodus: ‘If you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples’ (Exodus 19:5).

We find it in Deuteronomy: ‘You are a people holy to GOD, your God, who has chosen you out of all the peoples on earth to be his people, his treasured possession’ (Deuteronomy 7:6; also 14:2; 26:18).

The prophet Malachi declares: ‘They shall be mine, says our Mighty GOD, my special possession’ (Malachi 3:17).

¹⁸Those who worship false gods become like them,
as do all who put their trust in them.

This has a warning for us all. We are expert in creating false gods. We need to be constantly attentive and weed out our false images before they take deep root.

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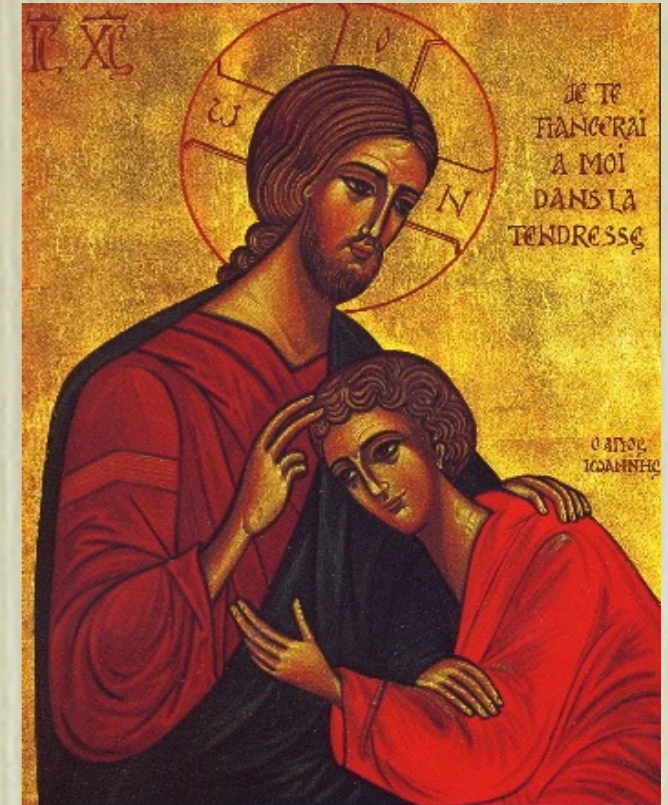
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