

**01A* THE TIMELESS PSALMS:
A CALL TO WORSHIP
ADVENT 1A 2013
PSALM 122**

- L: We gather together in our ancestral home of worship, faithfully established by our forebears within this nation, for the worship of our Delivering God.
P: We rejoice in the ages-long heritage of faith and love we receive from God.
- L: We are gathered together for worship in our community home, the hub for our outreach, where the vision of our forebears continues to God's greater glory.
P: We gather in the house of the Lord, celebrating the life of God amongst us.
- L: We gather together in our spiritual home, where we are at home with God. May there always be peace, joy and love experienced within these walls.
P: We come to God in worship and praise, as have countless people before us, to offer to our Redeeming God our worship and praises; and to pray for forgiveness and healing for all that interferes with our life together in God. Amen.

PSALM 122

A song for the ascent to Jerusalem. A Psalm of David

- 1** I was glad when they said to me,
"Let us go to the house of the LORD."
2 And now we are standing here inside your gates, O Jerusalem.
3 Jerusalem is a well-built city, knit together as a single unit.
4 All the people of Israel -- the LORD's people --
make their pilgrimage here.
They come to give thanks to the name of the LORD
as the law requires.
5 Here stand the thrones where judgment is given,
the thrones of the dynasty of David.
6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.
May all who love this city prosper.
7 O Jerusalem, may there be peace within your walls
and prosperity in your palaces.
8 For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, "Peace be with you."
9 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God,
I will seek what is best for you, O Jerusalem.

**PRAYERS OF THANKFULNESS & PETITION:
ADVENT 1A 2013
PSALM 122**

God of all times and places, we gather here today as one small part of God's family of grace, and we know and understand that we are all in God's holy presence. Together, with thankful minds and hearts, we share in the blessedness of being able to freely worship and celebrate our God. We give thanks for the spiritual insights your people have received within their local faith community, and in their own quiet ways, through their life-long commitment to the worship of God. But we also celebrate the worship experiences of other faithful pilgrims who risked different ways to receive spiritual refreshment, often from unexpected sources and people. We give thanks that we can learn from the devotion, worship concepts and practices that others knew throughout the ages, as they gathered to praise and worship God; and to pray and joyfully sing God's praises. May God's people experience and know God's peace within their walls.

Faithful God, we give thanks for people, who have not lost their faith in God, even though they have struggled to remain faithful in the most difficult of circumstances. Hear us, as we pray for people whose faith in God is being tested by those in authority as they wield their repressive and unjust laws; for people whose faith in God is tested because of family pressures; for people who are struggling with painful or debilitating health issues; or because they have lost their confidence in God's forgiving love and mercy for them, because they feel guilty, hopeless or inadequate. May God's people experience and know God's peace within their walls.

"I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.'"
Welcoming God, we give thanks that we can come to worship you; to learn more about you and your love for your people; for the experiences of God's goodness and blessings that we have shared together over the years we have worshipped together; and for the trust that grows through those shared worshipping experiences. We pray for congregations that are being torn apart because of insensitive behaviour by their leaders or members; because of lack of pastoral support; or because of divisive preaching or teaching that unsettles people's faith in God. Help us to remember that we are all called to proclaim God's glory, to worship in the beauty of God's holiness ¹ and that God joyfully accepts our sincere worship. May God's people experience and know God's peace within their walls. Amen.

**A PERSONAL MEDITATION:
ADVENT 1A 2013
PSALM 122**

The “Psalms of the Ascents” (Psalms 120-134) were sung by pilgrims as they made their slow way towards Jerusalem to celebrate the various religious festivals within the Jewish faith. Jerusalem, their holy city of God, was surrounded by the hills of Zion, and there too, was the mighty Temple Mount, where the Temple stood in all its glory, as the holy place of God’s presence. As the weary pilgrims approached the holy city, they would have raised their eyes heaven-ward to catch their first glimpse of the Temple; and recognised the symbolism of the Temple as God’s dwelling place “on high”. The Psalms gave Jerusalem a variety of titles including “Salem/Shalem – that is - the place of peace”; and Temple Mount itself, which was also known as “Zion”. The ancient prayer: *“O Jerusalem, may there be peace within your walls..”* and the greeting “Shalom”, sought to realise the hope of a peace-filled Jerusalem – where God could be worshipped in peace and joy.

Creative pause: God promised: *“...I will always watch over it and care for it...”*²

“...And now we are standing here inside your gates, O Jerusalem..... All the people of Israel -- the LORD's people – make their pilgrimage here...”
The definition of a “pilgrimage” is a journey of unspecified length for religious purposes, to a place that is holy or sacred to that pilgrim. For other people, a pilgrimage is when they regularly withdraw for a time spent in a quiet or sacred place, where they pray and/or meditate. The true value of going on either a static or a travelling pilgrimage, is that people intentionally choose to be in another time and space before God; as they quietly and gently seek through prayer and meditation to *“be still and know that God is indeed God.”*³

Creative pause: A pilgrimage can be a daily or once-in-a life-time faith journey.

“...Let us go to the house of the LORD...” takes on an additional meaning when *“the house of the Lord”* is also the community centre and the place to meet friends of all ages. The *“house of the Lord”* can also be a building or shelter of many styles and descriptions. In Nairobi, I saw a renovated cowshed that had been cleaned and painted blue for use by a very rapidly growing congregation, which was used as a new centre for the worship of God. In the Pacific Islands, natural fibres are often used to create places of worship. Then too, history tells us of caves being used for worshipping God, accessed only through secret tunnels, especially in times of persecution. Worship cannot always be held on Sunday, or even on schedule, as when I was in the Solomon Islands, church services could only be held when it was not raining, as the tropical deluge on the metal roof made it impossible to hear anything. *“The house of the Lord”* does not have to be a spacious or beautiful building, it is God’s holiness that gives any building its beauty; and the actual worship of God is all that is important.

Creative pause: We are called to worship in the beauty of God’s holiness. ¹

¹ Based on words from *“Together in Song”* #454
“Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness”
Words by John Samuel Bewley Monsell 1811-75
Words are in the public domain

² 1 Kings 9: 3b

³ Based on Psalm 46: 10a

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