

Psalms of Advent Week 1: Secure in Christ NOW

Our Security in Christ Our King and in His Community

Advent season, with its focus on the First and Second Arrivals of our Savior Jesus Christ, assures us of **our security in Christ NOW**. Our Anglican Advent antiphon from the Book of Common Prayer announces:

Our King and Savior *now* draws near: **O Come, let us adore him.**
(italics mine)

“**O Come, let us adore him**” are the opening thoughts of the call to worship from **Psalm 95:6-7** which abruptly turns to a warning: “*Today*, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...” Advent waiting and preparation help our hearts be open and responsive to God “Today,” NOW, in the present, one moment at a time. Also Advent reminds us to join in our King Jesus’s ways of making things right and of bringing real peace. Living out of our security in Christ NOW becomes a different lifestyle, a counter-cultural way of life.

Reflection 1

How might focusing on *being secure in Christ and his Body* change your emotions, thoughts, and actions in Advent 2021 as we begin our new year?

How has your experience with Advent changed over time? What about your experience of reading and praying Psalms, those 150 ancient Hebrew lyric poems for prayer and praise? How has that changed over time? (The nine psalms traditionally used in Anglican Advent worship are Psalms 24, 50, 72, 80, 85, 122, 126, 132, and 146.)

As we read Psalms 72, 122, 126 and 132 today with open hearts and Advent eyes, let’s look for how these psalms relate to our life in Christ NOW, in the present, in this time between the two “arrivals,” between the Incarnation and Second Coming, the “already,” and the “not yet.”

Psalm 72 is a *royal psalm* in which the Davidic king is the central figure. His authority comes from God, and his task is to rule as God’s representative in the kingdom on earth. Notice how **Psalm 72** is a prayer for desperate people and for people who care about desperate people.

Reflection 2

What do you learn from **Psalm 72** about the ideal Davidic King, his leadership style, and its effects?

How does **Psalm 72** inform your view of Jesus as your King *now* and of your current participation in his Kingdom? (See Mark 1:14-15.)

What stands out to you in Psalm 72's foreshadowing of the Ultimate Kingship of Jesus, King of kings and Lord of lords, across all space and time?

Psalm 72 shows us the kind of King of our lives we have now (and forever) in our King Jesus; **Psalm 122** shows us his community, the city we are in "already," and "not yet." This is a community we can be thrilled to be a part of and responsible to pray for in Advent 2021.

Psalm 122 is a *song of Zion*, the site of the Jerusalem temple holding the Ark of the Covenant, the place where God chose to be present with his people. **Psalm 122** is also one of the *Songs of Ascent* (Psalms 120-134). **Psalm 122** takes us on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for a festival feast. This brief and lovely psalm actually requires a whole lifetime to explore its layers and to begin to comprehend its challenge and glory. For now, think of these layers:

- Its Old Testament history as a place of worship and government
- Jesus's Jerusalem experiences and teaching
- His Body the Church's relationship with Jerusalem in the NT Epistles
- The New Jerusalem that will come down in the New Creation

The New Jerusalem has "already" begun in the Body of Christ, but it is "not yet," waiting for the consummation on the last day, the Second Advent of Christ. Think about the security and joy we each *now* have in Christ our King and His Church, the New Jerusalem, which will be completed as it comes down out of heaven from God and becomes our dwelling place with God forever.

Reflection 3

What is your understanding of the one command in **Psalm 122**? How might **Psalm 122:6-9** impact who and what you pray for in Advent 2021?

In Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible*, he explains that Songs of Zion guide faithful believers to rejoice in, give thanks for, and long for the presence of God in his congregation:

What Mount Zion and the temple were for the Israelites the church of God throughout the world is for us—the Church where God always dwells with his people in word and sacrament...The present and gracious God, who is in Christ who in turn is in his congregation, is the fulfillment of all thanksgiving, all joy and all longing in the Psalms. (Bonhoeffer, pp. 40-41)

Like **Psalm 122**, **Psalm 126** is also one of the *Songs of Ascent* used in the church for Advent worship and reflection. Even though it starts with the joy of captives returned to Israel from exile (the "already"), it quickly shifts to the

present need for more restoration (the “not yet”), for God to “do it again,” for God to show mercy *now* as he has done in the past.

Notice how *confident trust* develops as the psalmist honestly asks for more restoration. Life in Israel when the captives came back was difficult, just like our lives *now* remain difficult even though God has rescued us in Christ and brought us to himself. Past restorations of Zion are not yet the final restorations of Zion.

Reflection 4

Think about where in your life you need for God to “do it again,” to keep restoring and transforming you. What do you think the agricultural imagery in **Psalm 126:4-6** shows us about our part in our continuing transformation?

How does **Psalm 126:5-6** tell the truth about sowing the word of God as followers of Christ? How has that been true for you?

Finally, **Psalm 126** assures us that those who “sow in tears” will reap with “shouts of joy” — noisy, unrestrained joy! We have security in knowing that in Christ “our labor is not in vain.” (Compare Psalm 126:5-6 with I Cor. 15:58.)

In the dark parts of Advent 2021, with the ongoing health and political crises, where do you and people you know especially need encouragement that “our labor is not in vain,” that we shall “come home with shouts of joy”?

Psalm 132 is one of the arrival psalms of the *Songs of Ascent*. It is also a *psalm of the Davidic Covenant* (2 Samuel 7:11b-16). It is a poetic meditation about David and Zion, as much about David as it is about Zion. The Davidic covenant contains a conditional element in that wrong actions will have consequences that not even a king can escape, but God’s relationship with the people, mediated through *the reigning king of David’s lineage — the anointed one* — is based solely on God’s grace. It’s an unconditional promise.

Faithful believers in Israel held on to the promises of the Davidic covenant through the exile and beyond. Imagine people like Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna, before the angelic announcements and pregnancies and births, reflecting on **Psalm 132**. Maybe they asked God to remember, to act and do something about David, who longed for the Ark of the Covenant to be honored with a resting/dwelling place because it represented the Presence of God with his people. (**Psalm 132:1-10**) They wanted God to remember David’s part in envisioning the place and plans for the Temple on Mount Zion in Jerusalem and for God to have a dwelling place on earth. Could this be a foreshadowing of the Incarnation? Already now, in the Incarnation, the Word became flesh and “tabernacled” among us. Faithful Israelites also prayed for God to remember his oath to David described in **Psalm 132:11-12**.

Reflection 5

Psalm 132:11-18, about half of the psalm, answers the prayer of **132:8-10**. What assurance does it give? How is *God's promise to David* fulfilled in Luke 1:31-33 and Luke 2:9-12? What are we waiting for in Advent 2021? How might we be waiting for things God never promised instead of *waiting securely in Christ now* for what God has actually promised?
