

- *Jesus is our Messiah and He is our only 'priest'. What does this mean to you, and how does Jesus minister to your soul today?*

Final Prayer

Almighty Lord and God, I place the strains and stresses of this day into Your hands. Use my work, my recreation, my words and my thoughts, to further the work of Your Kingdom; and give me a glimpse of how what I have done fits Your greater plans, I pray. AMEN

Psalm 110

No: 21 Week: 171 Saturday 27/12/08

Prayer

Praise You, Lord God Almighty for rest and peace, for joy and freedom, for quiet and tranquillity and for the vigour of life. In Your wisdom You have created all things to work perfectly together, and You have given each of us a life that will please us and please You if we will follow Your will. Give us the grace to yield to Your good pleasure and design for our lives, and so be satisfied and complete. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Christmas

Christmas is a time when we tend to retreat into our homes for a few days with friends and family; so pray especially for your own family, loved ones and friends this Christmas time.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for people who work hard in shops over Christmas time*
- *Pray for all those whose work is to maintain essential services*
- *Give thanks for this special day and all that it means*

Meditation

Bless us with joy, Lord Jesus Christ,
Your gift of genuine happiness which leads to true contentment.

Bless us with faithfulness, Lord Jesus Christ,
Your gift of kindness to others we meet that never lets them down;

Bless us with mercy, Lord Jesus Christ,
Your gift of generosity in love which reaches out to all in need;

Bless us with patience, Lord Jesus Christ,
Your gift of strong resilience that sustains our faith and hope;

Bless us with peace, Lord Jesus Christ,
Your gift of calm tranquillity which stills the troubled breast;

Bless us with grace, Lord Jesus Christ,
Your gift of God's own blessed favour in which our souls may rest.

Bible Study - Psalm 110

¹ Of David. A psalm.

*The LORD says to my Lord:
'Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies
a stool for your feet.'*

² *The LORD will extend
your mighty sceptre out of Zion.
Rule in the midst of your
enemies!*

³ *Gifts are with you on the day of your
birth.
resplendent in holiness from the
womb of dawn
you possess the dew of your
youth.*

⁴ *The LORD has sworn and will not
relent:
'You are a priest forever,
in the order of Melchizedek.'*

⁵ *The Lord is at your right hand;
he will smite down kings
on the day of his wrath.*

⁶ *He will judge nations and heap up
the dead*

*crushing the rulers of all the earth.
⁷ He will drink from a stream by the
path;
and he will therefore lift up his
head.*

Review

This is a quite extraordinary psalm, and one that is well known to readers of the Bible because of its use in a number of significant places in the New Testament. Jesus quoted it when trying to persuade the Pharisees and others about the nature of the Messiah (Matt 22:44, Mark 12:36) and Peter used it in his famous Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:34) to declare the authority of the risen and ascended Christ. However, the reason I have chosen this psalm for our Christmas series is because not only does it speak about God's commissioning of His Son, there is a verse (v3) which is difficult to translate and in the version above, you will see that it has a strong connection with the story of the infant Jesus!

The issues to do with the translation of verse 3 are complex, but the traditional rendering ('Your people will offer themselves freely on the day of your power') is rather unsatisfactory, particularly when set against a second line which clearly speaks about 'the womb of dawn', whatever that may mean. In attempting to work at this strange verse, I came across a number of technical options for its translation which led me to the translation above. You might suggest that I have made the verse fit the Christmas story because it speaks about 'gifts' given to the Lord on the day of His birth, and implies the creation of the Lord at the 'womb of time', a phrase which possibly reflects the origins of the universe. This sounds remarkably like John's vision of Jesus as the 'eternal Word' (John 1:1f.). I can assure you that the translation I have given you is not just my opinion, and I have not created it to suit the occasion. Something very similar is published in at least one scholarly commentary, suggesting that it is a worthy and possibly correct translation of the original Hebrew!

The authority of the Messiah Now, what does this psalm say about Jesus, was born at Bethlehem? The first four lines and the last four lines speak of God's intent to give His Messiah all authority on earth. It is David (traditionally) who say the words of the psalm, and as Jesus points out (Matt 22:44), he speaks as if he is seeing a vision in which God is speaking to the Messiah; 'The Lord says to my Lord ...'. In this way, the psalm is very similar to what Mary says about the supreme authority of her son Jesus in the Magnificat (Luke 1:51); 'He has shown strength with His arm ... He has brought down the powerful from their thrones ...'. The reason why God sent Jesus into the world was not just that He should come to earth and live as a man, but so that after His life on earth, He would be lifted up to the highest heavens and rule all things with the authority of the Father!

The second verse of the psalm, and the sixth and seventh verses, also speak about the Messiah's rule over all God's enemies. The language is graphic and war-like, as so often in the Old Testament, but we should beware lest our more 'genteel' sensibilities prevent us from understanding that for most people on this planet in both the past and the present, life is lived against the odds of evil and strife which needs defeating. Our God says clearly that He will do this in the name of morality and justice. Why should we argue?

The gifts brought to Jesus as Messiah It is very clear that in the story of the birth of Jesus as found in Luke and Matthew, we read about gifts brought to Jesus. In Luke, the gifts are the worship of common people in the guise of shepherds; in Matthew, the gifts are three specific offerings brought by 'kings'. The kings come in homage to Jesus, and by common consent, they represent the obeisance of earthly rule to the infant Messiah. Bowing before Jesus (the normal posture for worship), both high officials and lowly

shepherds gave Jesus homage. The stories of Jesus' birth seem to reflect both the opening verses of this psalm, but also the amazing words of verse 3; 'gifts are with you on the day of your birth, resplendent in holiness from the womb of dawn; you possess the dew of your youth.'

This verse is explained by some scholars as referring to the usual royal gifts brought to a baby king, described in the flowery court language used to bless a royal birth. However, we cannot simply accept this. Surely Jesus received royal gifts at His birth? Surely Jesus was present with the Father in the womb of creation, at the 'dawn' of time? And surely, by common consent, His life was lived in youth, dying at the tender age of His early thirties; and He will live forever in the hearts of His followers as a young man.

Priest and King Whilst the third verse of this psalm is fulfilled by the birth of Jesus, the following verse 4 is also remarkably prophetic, speaking of the connection between the Messiah and the priest Melchizedek. The writer to the letter to the Hebrews reflects that Jesus fulfils this psalm perfectly, performing a priestly role for humanity outside of the earthly line of Aaron. The argument is arcane to us, because most of us believe in the 'priesthood of all believers' and the origins of earthly priesthood in Aaron do not concern us. However, Hebrews explains in a concise way that Jesus is our unique 'High priest' in fulfilment of Psalm 110 who ministers the gift of salvation and new birth.

This is what Jesus came into the world to do, and when we celebrate the Christmas story, we accept that God has sent not just a child to represent Him, but a Saviour who will do a powerful work to set us free and a priest who will establish a relationship between us and God, thereby overcoming all evil. In a strange and surprising way, psalm 110 is profoundly prophetic of the Christmas story!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Read through this psalm and discuss in your group the connections it has with the Christmas story.
2. What can we learn from this psalm about the authority and rule of the Messiah either now or in the future?
3. What can we learn from this psalm about the priestly work of the Messiah either now or in the future?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I have to say that when I first chose this psalm, I was not aware of the issue with verse 3 which lies at the heart of our study. I thought a psalm about the authority of the Messiah would be worth studying and simply accepted it as that. Imagine my surprise when I began to translate the psalm only to find myself producing the translation above that connects so evidently with the Christmas story! I was somewhat taken aback as I worked on each word and found the verse evolving as you read it now. This way of understanding the pointing of the text (the formal presentation of its vowels) is not common, but I did check it out before using it, and I hope you will find this helpful.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Jesus is our Messiah and His authority is our rule. How is this expressed in your life, and in what ways do you submit to Christ's authority? Make sure you are able to answer this question!*