

There are three psalms set for Morning Prayer today – 120, 121 and 122. These are all three wonderful messages and so I don't propose to choose just one to reflect on today!

Psalm 120 starts a group of psalms which finish at 134 and are all marked in the NRSV as "Psalms of Ascent". It is usually agreed that they are psalms used by pilgrims on their way up to the Temple at Jerusalem for the feasts. Psalm 120 begins the journey at some distance from the city, Psalm 121 might be on the way as it talks about the hills which might have been along the route and Psalm 122 talks at last about the city itself. They all benefit from being short and so are not difficult for us to read at one sitting. It is also thought that they were used in other contexts too. Scripture, as I'm sure you all know, has a way of bringing us a message for today's context.

Psalm 120 seems very personal and suggests the homesickness of people living in a foreign land. Today we may think of all the refugees here and elsewhere in the world driven from their own homes usually by war, weather conditions or extreme poverty. At present refugees can seem to be a problem. But recently I read an article about the falling birth rates in a large number of countries, especially in the developed world. We need each woman to produce at least 2.1 babies on average during her lifetime to maintain the population and in many countries this has now dropped to below 2. This means that by the mid-21st Century we will be encouraging refugees to come to us!

Psalm 121 is one of my personal favourites and I have talked about it before so I won't say too much here. The whole psalm is a great comfort, knowing that "the LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore". What more need I say?

Psalm 122 expresses the joy of arrival at a longed-for and hard-won destination. Verses 1-3, 6 and 7 were of course used by Hubert Parry for his anthem "I was glad" which we probably can all hum. A central theme is peace – the peace of Jerusalem certainly, but for Christians this doesn't just refer to the actual city but to the house of God which can be in any place where people find God. In these times, we need to find God wherever we are and wherever we need to travel – whether it's to the supermarket or off to work.

And so let us pray:

God of our pilgrimage,
bring us with joy to the eternal city
founded on the rock,
and give to our earthly cities
the peace that comes from above;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.