



## WAITING ON THE LIGHT

### *Praying with the Psalms through Advent*

#### **Introduction**

The Psalms are tried-and-true help to us as our souls wait afresh for the birth of our Lord at Christmas.

In this guide (which will appear weekly), one verse from a given psalm is presented for each day in Advent. Some of you may find it helpful to read all of the given psalm as part of your Advent devotions.

At the end of each daily meditation, a short prayer is provided.

#### **Week 4**

##### *The Fourth Sunday of Advent*

**'I will sing of your steadfast love, O Lord, for ever; with my mouth I will proclaim your faithfulness to all generations.'** *Ps 89. 1*

The words of Psalm 89, as they are sung in Latin, appear on a banner issuing from the mouth of Teresa of Avila in a famous portrait of the saint done in 1576, while she was still living. The painting portrays elderly Teresa being visited by the Holy Spirit, who descends in the form of a dove, a vision she had on the eve of Pentecost.

With these words taken from the psalm, the artist expresses the theme of St Teresa's life: her continued response of praise to God through all that she experienced. And praising God for 'his steadfast love and faithfulness' in all circumstances is precisely the message of Psalm 89.

The fifty-two-verse psalm can be divided into three parts. Part 1 (verses 1-18) is

a declaration of God's sovereign rule over all creation, praising him for his faithfulness, which is 'firm as the heavens' (verse 2). The universe is marked with countless signs of God's loving care. Its grandeur and order reflect the very nature of its Creator: great, awesome, strong and wonderful.

Part 2 (verses 19-37) applies that same focus on God's steadfast love and faithfulness to his dealings with the people of Israel, especially in his choice of David and his lineage. Just as the sun and the moon endure in the heavens, so David's throne shall endure on the earth (verses 36-37). Nothing can destroy God's earthly purposes any more than it can bring the stars down from the heavens.

Part 3 (verses 38-51), however, calls all of this into question or, rather, the psalmist calls God into question. 'But now' begins the psalmist's lament in verse 38. 'Now everything I thought was true seems to be up for grabs. The kingdom is tottering. The throne is falling. The city is in ruins. Have you forgotten your promises? Have you forgotten me?'

Perhaps the entire purpose of the first thirty-seven verses (the enthusiastic rehearsal of God's steadfast love and faithfulness in the past) is to allow the psalmist to make his complaint about the present, much as a child can freely cry in pain so long as it is locked in its mother's embrace. Put another way, even while he is lamenting the upheaval and disorder of his current circumstances, the psalmist is nevertheless doing so under his banner of praise.

The final verse of the psalm (52), even if it belongs less to the psalm than to an editor's pen, concludes the whole of Book Three of the Psalter, making the final lines of Psalm 89 the declaration of an undisputable truth: 'Blessed be the Lord for ever. Amen and Amen.'

### **Prayer**

As many signs as there are that trouble is near me,  
As many failures as there are that haunt me,  
As many sufferings as there are that cause me pain,  
This I know, O God:  
That there are countless more signs of your enduring love.  
Amen.