

Psalm 126

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

- ¹ When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion,
we were like those who dream.
- ² Then our mouth was filled with laughter
and our tongue with *shouts of joy*;
then it was said among the **NATIONS**,
“The Lord has done great things for them.”
- ³ The Lord has done great things for us,
and we rejoiced.
- ⁴ Restore our fortunes, O Lord,
like the *watercourses* in the *Negeb*.
- ⁵ May those who sow in tears
reap with *shouts of joy*.
- ⁶ Those who go out weeping,
bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with *shouts of joy*,
carrying their sheaves.

Luke 1:57-66

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- ⁵⁷ Now the time came for Elizabeth to give birth, and she bore a son. ⁵⁸ Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy to her, and they *rejoiced* with her.
- ⁵⁹ On the eighth day they came to circumcise the child, and they were going to name him Zechariah after his father. ⁶⁰ But his mother said, “No; he is to be called John.” ⁶¹ They said to her, “None of your relatives has this name.” ⁶² Then they began motioning to his father to find out what name he wanted to give him. ⁶³ He asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” And all of them were *amazed*.
- ⁶⁴ Immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God. ⁶⁵ **FEAR** came over all their neighbors, and all these things were talked about throughout the entire hill country of Judea. ⁶⁶ All who heard them pondered them and said, “What then will this child become?” For indeed **THE HAND OF THE LORD** was with him.

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

The Psalms are a collection of 150 poems, songs, and prayers written over hundreds of years by a multitude of authors, and finally compiled into what we have today in our Bibles. They are the prayers and worship songs of ancient Israel, given to God, then given back to us in the scriptures. Our reading today is part of the collection of the [Psalms of Ascents](#) (120-134). It seems to be written after the exile, talking of the deliverance of Israel which has already happened, but which is not yet complete. It acknowledges the hard fact that being saved by God. In a stunning way doesn't necessarily result in a trouble-free life. It uses two primary metaphors: 1. Water/drought; 2. seeds/harvest.

NATIONS:: גוֹי Plural form of יָיָ Pronounced /goy/meaning nation, people (as contrasted with the Israelites, the people of God), traditionally the enemies or adversaries of the Hebrew people.

Negeb:: נֶגֶב Pronounced /negeb/ which comes from an unused root meaning to be parched; the south (from its drought); specifically, the Negeb or southern district of Judah.

watercourses:: אֶפְיִק pronounced /aphiq/ meaning a channel (as holding, confining waters) like a stream-bed, ravine, wady. In the Negeb these would violently flood during monsoon rains, while being dry the rest of the year.

YOU MAY FIND THE MESSAGE TRANSLATION OF PSALM 126 EASIER TO ACCESS:

¹⁻³ It seemed like a dream, too good to be true,
when God returned Zion's exiles.

We laughed, we sang,
we couldn't believe our good fortune.

We were the talk of the nations—
“God was wonderful to them!”

God was wonderful to us;
we are one happy people.

⁴⁻⁶ And now, God, do it again—
bring rains to our drought-stricken lives
So those who planted their crops in despair
will shout “Yes!” at the harvest,
So those who went off with heavy hearts
will come home laughing, with armloads of blessing.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- When was the last time you were truly amazed? How did you respond?
- The psalmist puts into poetic words the tension of living in the already but not yet: we have tasted the realized promises of God; yet still haven't seen all of it. In Jesus we hear that the Kingdom of God has come to us and into the world; yet then in the Lord's prayer Jesus teaches us to pray "may your kingdom come." How do you live in the tension of already knowing God's active presence and not yet seeing it clearly?
- Have you ever long for, or dreamed of something for so long that you struggled to believe it was true when it came to pass?
- Sharon Salzberg, an author and mindfulness teacher, describes awe as "the absence of self-preoccupation," and argues it can help silence one's inner critic. Recall Zechariah's initial response to the angel's news. He is critical and wants certainty. However, in this part of the story, perhaps the miracle of finding his voice silences his criticism, allowing him to be swept up into awe, giving thanks for his place in the larger community of faith.¹⁴ Do you think that Zechariah's silencing was a punishment, or maybe a spiritual journey that led him to a new place of maturity?
- How does amazement change or shape us? What does it compel us to do? As soon as Zechariah's voice returns to him, he decides to sing—and not just any song, but a song of thanksgiving to God, a lullaby of blessing for his newborn son. You might argue that for Zechariah, the wondrous miracle of finding his voice again compels him to rejoice, to thank God, and to pass blessings onto others. Can we allow amazement to do this to us as well?¹⁵
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – *or to us, as a church* – to act, speak, be, or change, through this word of scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Luke :: is one of the four gospels. Only in two (Luke and Matthew) is the story of Jesus' birth told in detail. Luke's gospel is written according to tradition by Luke, a disciple-intern of the apostle Paul. He was very cultured and educated as we see from his vocabulary and writing. Luke emphasizes the down-and-out, those on the margin or "misfits" and how Jesus the Messiah comes for all people.

rejoiced :: the Greek word *συγχαίρω* pronounced *sugchairó* meaning "to rejoice with." The *sug* (συ) prefix means with – it has the notion that you [primarily] share sharing God's grace *with* another person, so that both rejoice together (mutually).

On the eighth day :: this is in reference to the Torah tradition "On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised." Leviticus 12:3

amazed :: the Greek word *θαυμάζω* pronounced *thaumazó* meaning "to marvel, wonder, to be amazed." A larger meaning is to be astonished out of one's senses; awestruck; speechless. Like joy, amazement is a common motif in the beginning of Luke's Gospel. The following people are specifically described as being amazed: the neighbors of the Judean hill country at John's birth (Luke 1:63), all those in Bethlehem who hear the shepherds' good news (Luke 2:18), and Mary and Joseph after they receive Simeon's blessing in the temple (Luke 2:33).

THE HAND OF THE LORD :: this expression is commonly used in the Hebrew Scriptures to express that God is with, or blesses, someone in their actions. For example Ezekiel in Ezekiel 37:1 Ezra in Ezra 7:2; and Elijah in 1 Kings 18:46; Moses in Exodus 33:22.

FEAR :: *φόβος* pronounced /*phobos*/ meaning panic flight, fear, the causing of fear, in Hebrew the word also has a strong connotation of respect, fear from recognizing the greatness of God as opposed to the smallness of human-kind.

¹⁴ taken from • SANCTIFIED ART HOW DOES A WEARY WORLD REJOICE? SERMON PLANNING GUIDE