

Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

Prayer for Israel's Restoration

To the leader: on Lilies, a Covenant. Of Asaph. A Psalm.

¹ Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock!
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim,
shine forth
² before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.
Stir up your might,
and come to save us!
³ *Restore us, O God;*
let your face shine,
that we may be saved.
⁴ O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's
prayers?
⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
⁶ You make us the scorn of our neighbors.
our enemies laugh among themselves.
⁷ *Restore us, O God of hosts;*
let your face shine,
that we may be saved.

¹⁷ But let your hand be upon the one at your
right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
¹⁸ Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.
¹⁹ *Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;*
let your face shine,
that we may be saved.

Luke 1:1-23
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

¹ Since many have undertaken to compile a narrative about the events that have been fulfilled among us, ² just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, ³ I, too, decided, as one having a grasp of everything from the start, to write a well-ordered account

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. Each Psalm varies in its origin and context, but it took several hundred years for the entire Psalter to be written, compiled, and arranged.

There is an old Christian phrase that in the Latin says "*lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi,*" which means: "The way we worship and pray, shapes the way we believe, which shapes how we live." What we pray for, becomes what we believe, which ultimately becomes how we live. How does today's psalm shape and influence how you live? (*Answering God*).

GENERAL THINGS TO NOTICE: Notice the repetition in this poem of prayer. What does it mean?

Restore us :: in Hebrew בּוּשׁוּ pronounced /*shoob*/ meaning to turn back, return, go back, to look back.

let your face shine :: in Hebrew this expression suggests the countenance of God. Seeing God's face was seeing God. Do you remember how Moses was said to have seen the back of the hand of God and his face then radiated or glowed for the rest of his life? It's even more than seeing God, it's the suggestion of seeing someone face to face – being in their presence, truly being with them, knowing them.

saved:: נִשְׂרָף pronounced /*yaw-shah'*/ meaning to deliver; To avenge, liberate, help, preserve, rescue....
From what does the psalmist pray to be saved or delivered?

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. Today's story focuses on the way God turns the world right side up through Jesus as the seeds of the story begin to sprout within the exclusion and cultural disgrace of a childless couple.

for you, most excellent **THEOPHILUS**,⁴ so that you may have a firm grasp of the words in which you have been instructed.

⁵ In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.⁶ Both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord.⁷ But they had no children because *Elizabeth was barren*, and both were getting on in years.

⁸ Once when he was serving as priest before God during his section's turn of duty,⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord to offer incense.¹⁰ Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside.¹¹ Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified, and fear overwhelmed him.¹³ But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John.¹⁴ You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth,¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. *He must never drink wine or strong drink*; even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.¹⁶ He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God.¹⁷ With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before him, to turn the hearts of parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."¹⁸ Zechariah said to the angel, "How can I know that this will happen? For I am an old man, and my wife is getting on in years."¹⁹ The angel replied, "I am Gabriel. *I stand in the presence of God*, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.²⁰ But now, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time, you will become mute, unable to speak, until the day these things occur."

²¹ Meanwhile the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering at his delay in the sanctuary.²² When he did come out, he was unable to speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the sanctuary. He kept motioning to them and remained unable to speak.²³ When his time of service was ended, he returned to his home.

THEOPHILUS:: the name in Greek mean lover/admirer/friend (**PHILUS**) of God (**THEO**).

Elizabeth was barren:: although from a good family, her infertility, compounded by her old age is what she calls her disgrace (1:25). It's a harsh judgment backed by centuries of social convention (see Genesis 16:4, 11; 29:32; 30:1). Her blameless life doesn't spare her the judgment by her people. This is what Zechariah has long been praying to be delivered from (see verse 13).*

to enter the sanctuary:: this first story in Luke's gospel begins in the Temple with Zechariah faithfully doing his duty, and end in the temple with the disciples of Jesus "continually blessing God" (Luke 24:53).*

never drink wine:: this is part of the special lifestyle code or vows taken by Nazarenes or Nazarites (those set aside for a particular religious role) followed in ancient Judaism. Other aspects are described in Numbers 6.

I stand in the presence of God:: this expression is similar to that of seeing the face of God.

* Notes from Feasting on the Gospels Luke, Vol 1, pp. 10-15.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- From what does the psalmist poet need to be delivered? How can you identify with the prayer of Psalm 80?
- Why is Zechariah so weary? Why is he unable to believe in God's deliverance?
- Why don't the people in the sanctuary say anything when they realize that Zechariah had seen a vision.
- 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?