

A large, dense evergreen Christmas tree, likely a spruce or fir, is the central focus of the image. It is set against a solid teal background. The tree's branches are thick and covered in dark green needles, with some lighter green tips visible. The overall mood is festive and anticipatory.

*Can't wait 'til
Christmas!*

IN 2020 CHRISTMAS CAN'T
COME SOON ENOUGH...

CAN'T WAIT

It's been a long year. It's been a hard year. If you're feeling like Christmas can't come soon enough, we don't blame you. Old Testament Israel eagerly looked forward to encountering God in the temple in Jerusalem, and sung songs of ascent on their way. Join us as we look forward to the joy, peace, and love that's ours as we encounter Jesus at Christmas.

Songs of Ascent

The Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-134) were a collection of songs sung by the Israelites as they made their way to the temple and the city of Jerusalem for Old Testament feasts and festivals like the Passover.

Jerusalem – sometimes called Mount Zion – sat on top of a hill. But it was not a big hill! The reason the Israelites talked about 'ascending' to Jerusalem had less to do with its elevation above sea level and more to do with its significance. In Jerusalem was the temple of Yahweh, where God's presence dwelt. It was the most significant place on earth—the place where humanity had some kind of access to God. It was where sinful humans could have some sort of peace with the holy God through temple sacrifices. And it was the place where God's chosen king ruled over God's people.

When we transpose these Songs of Ascent into a New Testament key, they clearly point us to Jesus. In Jesus we have access to God, and all the blessings that go with it. In Jesus we have a perfect sacrifice that brings peace. In Jesus we have God's chosen and eternal king.

Old Testament Israel looked forward with delight to encountering God in Jerusalem, but as we look forward to encountering Christ at Christmas, our delight, peace, comfort, and joy is amplified beyond comparison.

Joy, Peace, & Love

Amid lockdowns, unknowns, physical distancing, and social isolation, joy, peace, and love have seemed elusive this year. But they're all ours in the most profound way in the gift of Christ Jesus.

November 8 th	Psalms 122	Delight
November 15 th	Psalms 126	Hope
November 22 nd	Psalms 130	Thankfulness
November 29 th	Psalms 132	Confidence
December 6 th	Psalms 134	Celebration
December 13 th	Luke 2.1-20	Joy
December 20 th	Luke 2.1-20	Peace
Christmas Day	1 st John 4.7-12	Love

STUDY 1

PSALM 122

Are you looking forward to Christmas? Why, or why not? How do you think most people are feeling as 2020 draws to an end?

READ PSALM 122.1-5

Psalms were used as songs and prayers. What feeling and emotion drives the first part of this psalm?

Where are the singers standing, and what are they singing about?

What particular things about Jerusalem bring delight?

Why would an Old Testament Israelite be glad to visit the temple in Jerusalem (“the house of the LORD”)?

How does the psalm convey delight in Jerusalem’s

- security and strength?
- unity?
- justice and loving authority?

As New Testament Christians, where do we find similar delights?

READ PSALM 122.6-9

How does the tone and feeling of the psalm change?

What is the psalm longing for (verses 6-7)?

For whose sake does the psalmist want these things (verses 8-9)?

READ REVELATION 21.1-4 AND 21.22-27

This part of Revelation uses **picture language** to give us a sneak peek into the future. In what ways is the new Jerusalem similar to Jerusalem in Old Testament times?

In what ways is the new Jerusalem different to Jerusalem in Old Testament times?

THINK IT OVER

Discuss all the ways Jesus is for us what Jerusalem and it's temple were for the psalmist.

Looking at the parts of Revelation 21 we read earlier, make a list of the things we delight in and look forward to.

Which of your 'family and friends' (Psalm 122.8) need to experience these joys of knowing Jesus?

As you read the description of Jerusalem in Psalm 122 – which is really a description of the heavenly Jerusalem – which phrase do you find the most comforting or heartening?

STUDY 2

PSALM 126

Do you ever wish things could go back to the way they were before? What is it about the way things were that you appreciate now?

READ PSALM 126.1-3

Psalm 126 begins by looking back to a good time in Zion's (Jerusalem's) history. How does the song describe this time?

When the surrounding nations saw Jerusalem, what did they notice?

Can you think of any times in your life when God has “done great things” for you?

READ PSALM 126.4

Do a quick web search and see what you can discover about the Negev.

How does the imagery (‘streams in the Negev’) of this short prayer help us see what the psalmist is asking God to do?

What does this short prayer tell us about the present situation of the psalmist?

READ PSALM 126.5-6

How does the song compare the present with the future?

THINK IT OVER

Read John 16.16-22. What is Jesus talking about with his disciples? How is Psalm 126 an anticipation of what Jesus has done?

How has Jesus' death and resurrection 'restored our fortunes'?

"Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy!" (Psalm 126.5). In what ways is this a good picture of the Christian life?

How might you pray for (Psalm 126.4), fight for, and rediscover the joy of knowing Jesus at the times when life is full of grief, tiredness, and disappointment?

STUDY 3

PSALM 130

Share the last thing you had to wait a long time for. How did it feel having to wait?

READ PSALM 130

What things stand out to you from this psalm?

READ PSALM 130.1-2

Imagine what the original author of this might have been going through.

Identify the different elements of this writers cry:

Where from:	Who to:	What for:

READ PSALM 130.3-4

What would happen if God did keep a record of our sins?

What does God offer to his people instead?

Why does he show this mercy?

READ PSALM 130.5-6

Draw and describe the role of a watchman.



What does it mean to wait for the LORD (more than watchmen wait for morning)?

Why do we no longer have to wait like this?

READ PSALM 130.7-8

What does the psalm call Israel to do? Why?

Come up with a definition for redemption.

How has God ultimately fulfilled this promise to redeem his people?

THINK IT OVER

Choose your own adventure...

When have you felt in the depths? What would it look like for you to put your hope in the word of the LORD at those times?	Why can only God offer forgiveness? How do we receive that mercy instead of his judgement?	We have forgiveness in Jesus. What will it look like to now serve him with reverence at BPC?	What will it look like to put your hope in the LORD this week? How can you call others to do the same?

STUDY 4

PSALM 132

Share a time you have you have sung for joy! What was the reason?

This Psalm draws on the memory of God's great promise to King David. Have a read to help you understand the context for Psalm 132...

READ 2nd SAMUEL 6.1-5 AND 2nd SAMUEL 7.1-17

Why did David want to bring the Ark of God to Jerusalem?

Then what did David want to do?

What did God promise instead?

READ PSALM 132.1-10

Brainstorm: What do you remember about the life of David?

Why did David want to make a temple for the LORD?

What is the prayer of those going to worship God in Jerusalem?

READ PSALM 132.10-18

How does God's oath match the prayers of the people?

What does this teach us about God's character?

How and when will these promises of God come true:

- A King from the line of David who will rule forever? (Acts 2.29-36)
- A New Jerusalem with blessing and salvation? (Revelation 21.1-5)

THINK IT OVER

How do we enjoy God's presence and Jesus' rule in life today?

What are you most looking forward to about Zion / the New Jerusalem?

Describe how you can sing for joy about these things this week.

STUDY 5

PSALM 134

What do you like to do first when you get to the end of a long journey?

READ PSALM 134

Remember these Psalms of Ascent were sung as the Israelites travelled to the temple in Jerusalem for special Old Testament feast days and celebrations. Appropriately, the last of these psalms is a song to sing upon arrival.

When do the travellers arrive at their destination? How might they have been feeling?

What do the singers encourage one another to do upon arrival?

What do you think it means to bless the LORD (verse 1)?

Do you find it easy or difficult to spend time with God at the end of a long and tiring day (or week, or year!)?

What do you know about the sanctuary (NIV) or holy place (ESV) in the Old Testament temple?

If the holy place was the place of symbolic atonement between Israel and God, and the place where humans could 'meet' God, where is our holy place now?

What might it mean for us to 'lift up our hands' in response to Jesus? Does it just mean lifting up our hands when we sing at church? Or might it mean more? If so, what?

Draw a quick sketch of what verse 3 describes.

READ HEBREWS 12.22-24

Remember Zion was another name for the hill Jerusalem and the temple sat on. Who is our 'Mount Zion'?

How does the author of Hebrews say God has blessed us from Mount Zion?

THINK IT OVER

It's been a long, hard year. How does Christmas bring comfort to you at the end of 2020?

As you look back over 2020, what are some of the things you can thank God for?

As we look back over 2020, what are some of the things BPC can thank God for?

At Christmas we celebrate 'he who made heaven and earth' (Psalm 134.3) coming into the world as a baby, to live and die to rescue sinners. Spend some time thanking God for this extraordinary blessing.

STUDY 6
JOY

READ LUKE 2.1-20

Use this space for personal study, 1-1, or bible talk notes.

STUDY 7

PEACE

READ LUKE 2.1-20

Use this space for personal study, 1-1, or bible talk notes.

STUDY 8
LOVE

READ 1st JOHN 4.7-12

Use this space for personal study, 1-1, or bible talk notes.