



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



# The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 113

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# Introduction

- This Psalm has no title and therefore, the author is not known
- Psalm 113 is the third Psalm in a group of Psalms in Book Five of Psalms, known as the Alleluia Psalms (Psalms 111-118)
- It is also the first of a collection of six Psalms (Psalms 113-118) that are known as the Hallel or Hymn of Praise Psalms
- There are three groups of Hallel Psalms
- The Egyptian Hallels: Psalms 113 to 118
- The Great Hallels: Psalms 120 to 136, including the Psalms of ascents
- The conclusive Hallels: Psalms 146 to 15



# Introduction

- The Egyptian Hallel Psalms 113 to 118 were sung at the Passover, Pentecost, the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Dedication, and on all the New Moons
- At the Passover it was divided into two parts, the first consisting of Psalms 113-114, sung before the second Cup at the Paschal Supper was passed around, and thus before the meal itself, which began immediately after that ceremony
- The second part consisted of Psalms 115-118, sung after the filling of the fourth Cup, and this was the hymn which Christ and the Apostles are stated to have sung after the Last Supper, before they went out to Gethsemane (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26)



# Introduction

- Psalm 113, classified as a community hymn of praise
- Calling its hearers to praise the name of the Lord for all of the Lord's goodness to the people, it is an appropriate introduction to the Passover story, which is then recounted in the following Psalm, Psalm 114
- Psalm 113 begins and ends with Alleluia
- This Psalm evidently belongs to the post-exile period, and expresses the gratitude of Israel for its restoration from the Captivity
- But some commentators believe the author is David



# Introduction

- This Psalm has some similarities with Hannah's prayer, (1 Samuel 2:2-10), and St. Mary's, the Virgin Mother of God, praise, (Luke 1:47-55)
- Psalm 113 is prayed in the First and Nineth Hours of the Agpeya, the Prayer Book of the Hours



# Introduction

## Psalm Outline

- A Call to Unceasingly Praise God 113:1-3
- The Greatness of God's Glory 113:4-6
- God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9

# A Call to Unceasingly Praise God 113:1-3



- This is the third consecutive Psalm to begin with, *Alleluia, Praise the Lord*
- As in Psalms 111-112, it is both a personal statement of praise and an encouragement for others to do the same
- Who are the *servants of the Lord*?
- They are all the believers who fear the Lord and those who serve the Lord willingly and cheerfully, with much pleasure and delight, in righteousness and holiness, with reverence and godly fear

# A Call to Unceasingly Praise God 113:1-3



- *O servants*, You who profess to serve and obey Him; who acknowledge Him as your God
- All *the servants* are called to offer up spiritual sacrifices to God
- Let it be your main focus, *O servants of the Lord*, all you who claim to be servants of God, to reflect with a pure mind on the greatness of your Lord, and with all the affections of your heart to praise His infinite name
- God's *servants* have special reason to praise Him
- They have the honor of sharing in His great work, and they are promised eternal reward for doing so



# A Call to Unceasingly Praise God 113:1-3



- The name of God is used three times in this verse, and we are called upon to praise it three times
- *Praise the name of the Lord*, This means honoring and exalting God Himself and His character, which are represented by His *name*
- The repetition of the exhortation means either the abundance of praise to be given to the Lord, or the continuance of it; which ought to be done at all times, every day, since His mercies are new every morning
- According to St. John Chrysostom praise is a kind of sacrifice and offering pleasing to God

# A Call to Unceasingly Praise God 113:1-3



- St. John Chrysostom says, “let us not take this praise lightly, let our life give voice to it before our mouth, let our morals express it before our tongue. In this way we are able to give praise to God even while remaining silent; in this way even when we speak we make music in harmony with our life.”
- In verse 1, we were encouraged to praise the name of God
- In this next verse we are encouraged to do it *forevermore*
- As we, the wretched, do not know how to praise God as we ought, he now tells us how it should be done, and says it should be done at least with affection and desire

# A Call to Unceasingly Praise God 113:1-3



- *Blessed be the name of the Lord*, with all the affections of your heart, at the present time, *and forevermore*, to all future generations, so that there shall never be an end to His praise
- From the beginning of time the Lord's name was to be praised, and was praised by the angels, who were present at laying the foundation of the earth, Job 38:4, and all the works of the Lord, in their way, have praised Him ever since
- St. Augustine says, “Why was it said: ‘from this time forth? ... Namely, from this very moment in which you utter these words, start praising, and praise forevermore.’”

# A Call to Unceasingly Praise God 113:1-3



- And St. John Chrysostom says, “Will it in fact not be blessed if you do not pray? Do you note that he is not speaking about the blessing belonging to Him and attributed to His nature but what is done by human beings? About this Paul also speaks in his letter: *‘Glorify God in your body and in your spirits, which are God’s’* (1 Corinthians 6:20)... He is mighty and praiseworthy; yet He becomes so when those serving Him give evidence of such a way of life that all witnesses bless their Lord. This is also what Christ commanded us pray, ‘Hallowed be Your name’ that is may be glorified also by our life. Just as it is dishonored when our way of living is evil, so it is glorified and blessed when we practice virtue.”

# A Call to Unceasingly Praise God 113:1-3



- God's praise is not merely to be ceaseless, but universal
- Not restricted by the limits of Judea, but extending to the utmost limits of the earth
- This establishes the geographical boundaries within which God's name is to be praised
- He speaks by the mouth of the Prophet: *"For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations," Says the Lord of hosts*" (Malachi 1:11)

# A Call to Unceasingly Praise God 113:1-3



- It is a prophecy when the Gospel should be sent into all the world; and many should be called from the east and west, from the north and south, and fear the Lord and worship Him, and offer a pure offering of praise unto Him; and His name be great among the Gentiles
- St. John Chrysostom says, “Do not you see how he put an end to the Jewish ways and worship, and proclaimed the way of life of the church, and her worship?”
- God’s praise ought to be praised by all nations
- For in every place, from east to west, there reveal the clear evidences of His wisdom, power, and goodness

# The Greatness of God's Glory

## 113:4-6



- Verse 4 is the first of six verses (the rest of this Psalm) that show why God is worthy of praise, *The Lord is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens*
- God's praise is to be found not only through the length "*this time forth and forevermore*" and breadth "*the rising of the sun to its going down*", but even through the height of the world, *The Lord is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens*
- For, though there may be many great kings and powerful princes therein, God far out tops them all, not only *all the nations*, but even over all the Angels, *for His glory is above the heavens*, and all who dwell therein

# The Greatness of God's Glory

## 113:4-6



- He rules over all nations; He directs their affairs; He is their sovereign king
- St. Augustine says, “The heathen are men: what wonder if the Lord be above all men? They see with their eyes those whom they worship high above themselves to shine in heaven, the sun and moon and stars, creatures which they serve while they neglect the Creator. But not only ‘is the Lord high above all heathen;’ but ‘His glory’ also ‘is above the heavens.’ The heavens look up unto Him above themselves.”
- The question, *Who is like the Lord our God* is not literal, it intended to make a point instead of trying to obtain an answer



# The Greatness of God's Glory

## 113:4-6



- The expected answer is *No one is like God*
- His exaltation above everything on earth or heaven shows that God is incomparable
- Nothing exists that is greater than He *who dwells on high*
- God is to be praised as absolute, incomparably, and infinitely great; for He *dwells on high*, and from on high sees all, and rules all, and justly attracts all praise to Himself
- *Who humbles Himself*, God has everything subject to Him; and yet, such is His goodness, that He looks after, and attends to the smallest matters, things, and persons, and especially to the meek and humble of heart

# The Greatness of God's Glory

## 113:4-6



- When we understand the greatness of God, His interest and care for creation especially mankind is remarkable
- Here the psalmist shared the idea of David in Psalm 8:4: *What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?*
- Psalm 144:3 has a similar sense of amazement
- What amazes the psalmist is that God is exalted so high that he has to *humbles Himself* to see not only the earth but also the heavens, and yet at the same time He cares for the lowly

# The Greatness of God's Glory

## 113:4-6



- In His humility and love, God beholds the heavenlies and cares for them, how much more would be His humility when He cares for the men down on earth, *“and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, To set them among princes And make them inherit the throne of glory.”* (1 Samuel 2:8)
- If it is such humility for God *to behold The things that are in the heavens and in the earth*, what an amazing humility was it for the Son of God to come from heaven to earth and take our nature that He might, *“seek and to save that which was lost.”* (Luke 19:10)
- The words true of Him Who as God left heaven and became man

# The Greatness of God's Glory

## 113:4-6



- It was most fitting that His Blessed Mother should adapt this Psalm to herself, saying, *“He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant.”* (Luke 1:48)
- St. Augustine says, “He who humbles Himself to behold the things that are in the heavens and in the earth” ... He glorifies the humble, yet not to make them proud. For He dwells in those whom He lifts up high, makes them His heaven for Himself; And seeing them not proud, but perpetually submitting to Him, He, while being in heaven, He beholds them as a dwelling place for Himself.”

# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- When God in heaven beholds the things on earth (verse 6), He sees the *poor* down in the *dust* and the *needy* in the *ash heap* – and He *raises* them up
- These words are taken with but little variation from the Song of Hannah (1 Samuel 2:8), and are recalled, though not exactly cited, in the praise of St. Mary (Luke 1:52)
- “*To sit in the dust*” (Isaiah 47:1), “*Embrace ash heaps*” (Lamentations 4:5) is an oriental metaphor for a condition of extreme degradation and misery
- He explains why God *looks down* on the humble, and says it is to exalt them

# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- And though this is most applicable to individuals raised by God from the lowest to the highest position, such as Joseph, Moses, David, and others, it is also most true of the whole human race, that is, of the little flock to whom our Savior said, *“Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”* (Luke 12:32)
- God has humbled Himself to encounter those who sit on *the ash heap*; with the sinners, to forgive them, to sanctify them, and to prepare them to have fellowship with the heavenlies in their everlasting heavenly praise

# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- There are several spiritual ideas brought out by the commentators, who understand the *poor* or *needy* as Christ Himself, taken up first into mortal existence from the pure earth of Virgin Mary, taken up again in the Ascension from earth to heaven
- In reference to Christ, St. John Chrysostom reminds us that by His birth in the manger-stable, He was literally brought down in His humiliation to *the ash heap*, whence He was exalted again to riches and honor (Resurrection/Ascension), whereof holy Job was a type

# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- Some take the *dust* or *earth*, to be the Jews, and they take the Gentiles as being referred to as the *ash heap*, and they tell us that Christ chooses His elect from both of these indiscriminately, to set them with His angels and saints in heaven
- Or it may be applied both to the Gentiles alone
- The first signifying the malice and poverty of their views about God
- And the second, the foulness of their idolatrous rites
- Then we are taught that God puts them on a level with the Jews, truly the *princes of His people*, for Israel denotes a “Prince with God.”



# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- *He may seat him with princes*, The words of 1 Samuel 2:8 are still followed
- The story of God's care for Hannah thus becomes a model for God's care for Israel
- It is a figure for elevation to the highest rank and dignity, Job 36:7
- God lifts the *poor* and *needy* from the depths *up to* the heights
- May give him a position - with nobles and great people upon the earth
- When Joseph's virtue was tried and shown, he was raised from the prison-dust and *set with princes*

# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- The Holy Bible is well-supplied with instances where God made something remarkable out of ordinary people
- Abraham became the father of nations
- The shepherd boy David slayed the giant Goliath—and later became king
- Gideon and his little band of 300 soldiers defeated a mighty army
- St. Mary, an ordinary young woman from an obscure town, became the mother of the savior of the world
- Saul, the chief of sinners, became St. Paul, the chief of the apostles

# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- In light of the new covenant, we can make the connection with God's work in the life of the believer as described in Ephesians 2:5-6: *"...even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."*
- The elevation from a state of sin and death to that of glory and immortality, to an equality with the angels, to share in that happiness that, indeed, is the true and the most to be sought for elevation

# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- A barren woman was a social outcast; she was a disappointment to her husband and to other women
- With mankind a low position is considered a misfortune, and barrenness is looked upon in the same light by womanhood
- But, as God looks down on the humble man so as to raise him from the lowest to the highest position, He also looks down on the humble woman, thereby changing her barrenness into fertility
- The reference in verse 6-7 to the Song of Hannah suggests this further reference to the experience of Hannah, as an instance of the way in which God has compassion on those who are despised

# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- This, too, is suggested as a reason why God should be praised and worshiped
- This is quite applicable to several females, such as Sara, Rebecca, Rachel, Anne, and others; but it must not be restricted to a literal interpretation
- And probably under the figure of the once childless wife delighted with a family of sons, the Psalmist intends to point to Zion, Isaiah 54:1,66:8
- Some interpret *the barren woman*" as Israel (Isaiah 54:1), whose curse of barrenness was ultimately removed, and who became, as here prophesied, a joyful mother of children (Isaiah 49:12,18,20,54:2,3,60:5)

# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- Yet some take it of the Church gathered from the gentiles, that remained barren a long time, but ultimately begot many children according to the words of Isaiah, “*Sing, O barren, You who have not borne ...*” (Isaiah 54:1) adopted later and republished by St Paul in his letter to the Galatians (Galatians 4:27)
- Others take the verse of a soul that was unfruitful in good works, but wedded to Christ by repentance and love, and bringing forth abundant children to Him
- *a joyful mother of children*, as the barren woman is when she becomes the mother of children; and indeed, every woman rejoices when a man is born into the world, John 16:21

# God's Care for the Lowly 113:7-9



- And so does the church and people of God, when souls are born again among them; this causes great joy among the saints; Psalm 87:4
- *Praise the Lord*; The caring, loving God who comes from the highest heaven to help the humble of the earth is worthy of praise
- Not only for the church's fruitfulness, but for all the great and good things the Lord has promised to do for His people
- It is significant to remember that Jesus sang these words on the night He was betrayed and arrested, the night before His crucifixion



# Discussion

- When should the name of the Lord be praised?
- Where should the name of the Lord be praised?
- What is the name of the Lord and why is it praiseworthy?
- What motivated the psalmist to write this hymn of praise to the Lord?



# Discussion



- How is God's love demonstrated to His people?
- How does God honor the lowly?
- How do verses 7-9 highlight God's compassion?
- What does this Psalm teach us about how to praise the Lord?