



# still waters

home church studies

## Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19 [Worship]

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.

### Consider:

### [Words]

In ancient Israel, God characteristically answers petitionary prayers with powerful intervention. In Psalm 80, three times Israel prays that YHWH should be present in its time of need; that YHWH will restore and save (verses 3, 7, 19). Israel relies completely on the life-giving, life-restoring capacity of YHWH.

These readings affirm that the urgent petition of Israel is answered by the birth of the baby whose name is "save" (Matthew 1:21). In

Hebrew, the proper name "Jesus" is derived from the verb "to save." The birth of Jesus enacts God's power to "save" in the world, the embodiment of God's transformative energy and resolve.

The accent in the gospel narrative is on the poetic verse 23 (a quote from Isaiah 7:14), that his name will be "Emmanuel." The oracle of Isaiah affirmed that Jerusalem would not be abandoned to its enemies because YHWH was with the city to defend it. In Matthew's use of that declaration, Jesus is "God with us." Long before any doctrinal formulations in the church, the earliest witnesses recognized in Jesus God's own power to save, from sin, from evil, from death, from disease, from hunger, from despair, from all that works against the full shalom that God wills for the world.

The early church was overwhelmed by what it sensed of God's power for life in the person of Jesus. It struggled and stammered to find ways to say it. Paul identifies Jesus as "descended from David" (Romans 1:3); Matthew makes the birth more dramatically awesome and special. All of that, however, is secondary. What counts for these witnesses is the power of God whereby we receive "grace" and "apostleship" (Romans 1:5): *grace* to live freely in joy and *apostleship* to be sent on a mission beyond ourselves. Israel's prayer for restoration—eventually the prayer of the world—has been abundantly answered. Those who receive the Christ child are sent to tell the news of God's transformative presence in the world.

– Walter Bruggemann

### [Scripture]

## Isaiah 7:10-16

10 Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, saying, 11 Ask a sign of the LORD your God; let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven. 12 But Ahaz said, I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test. 13 Then Isaiah said: "Hear then, O house of David! Is it too little for you to weary mortals, that you weary my God also? 14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel. 15 He shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. 16 For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted.