

Psalm 121 in the Bible is a Psalm of leave-taking.

It is probably written for use by a person, or persons, or a group of people leaving their community, and for the community who perhaps stand at the edge of the town or village bidding them farewell. Each pray God's protection on the other. In the days this was written and used the image is particularly of pilgrimage. Of the pilgrim or pilgrims going to Jerusalem for a great Festival, or the Passover, or simply on a pilgrimage to the Holy City, the Holy Mount Zion. The Psalm is called 'A song of Ascents' : Going up. Going 'up' to Jerusalem (compare going 'up' to London). Also - ascending the Holy Hill to the great Temple in Jerusalem. Ascending to the Dwelling place of God. To God.

We can think of it as the person or person's departure: The leave-taker or leave-takers say, perhaps with some concern as to what the future holds : *I lift up my eyes to the hills — from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

The Sending community replies: *The Lord will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.*

It is also thought to be a Psalm for all those who remain to carry on the good work that has been begun, perhaps with some concern as to what the future might hold. They, too, are pilgrims. Sojourners on the earth. Just for a season. On their own pilgrimage but also aware that perhaps they, too, might one day take the journey that the leave-taker or takers have taken.

They who remain behind, who are on the same journey as all pilgrims, say: *We lift up our eyes to the hills— from where will our help come? Our help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

And they are comforted and encouraged by this response: *The Lord will not let your feet be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*

They receive God's assurance: *The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.*

It is also thought to be a Psalm of the Pilgrim's arrival. He or she is met at the gates of Jerusalem, at the gates of the great Temple. At the entrance to the dwelling-place of God. We can think of it as the next person who you are going to welcome to ministry here at St Mary's.

So the person arriving says: *I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.* The Receiving community replies: *The Lord will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and for evermore.*

I thank you all for the love, the kindness, and the support shown to Maggie and me during our ministry among you. I ask for your understanding and forgiveness for mistakes I have made and for expectations I have not met. I am grateful for the ways my ministry has been accepted. As I leave, I carry with me all that I have learned here.

So we pray:

God, whose everlasting love for us all is trustworthy, help each of us to trust the future which rests in your care. The time we were together here in your name saw our laughter and tears, our hopes and our fears. Guide us as we hold close these cherished memories, but now as we move in new directions, until that time when we are completely one with you and with each other in the Kingdom which is yet to come.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

And now, may the Lord bless us, defend us from all evil, and bring us to everlasting life.

Amen