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The Wings of God - Psalm 91

A service plan for Lent from Psalm 91 focused on the protection we find in the loving care of God in a Lenten series on the Psalms

Worship Service

Also in this Series

Psalms for a Lenten Journey

This series of worship services for Lent is built around a sampling of the Psalms.

- [Beginning a Lenten Journey](#)
- [I Called and God Heard](#)
- [Covered Sins](#)
- [The Wings of God](#)
- [Seeing Clearly in the Sanctuary](#)
- [Open the Gates](#)
- [I Love the Lord](#)
- [When We Feel Forsaken](#)
- [From Dust to Kingship](#)

Theme of the Service

This is the fourth of these services, and this time of worship is formed by the message of Psalm 91.

The theme of this service is the secure protection that the child of God discovers in the loving care of God. This care is represented by verse 4 of Psalm 91, "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge...."

We are grateful for the collaborative efforts of two colleagues at Calvin Theological Seminary: Professor Carl Bosma, Associate Professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary, for the [sermon notes](#) and Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., the President of the Seminary, for his sermon on Psalm 91, "The Wings of God," which you will find following the liturgy.

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WE GATHER IN WORSHIP

Prelude: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" [see music notes]

The Call to Worship

*Song of Praise: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" PH 482:1-2, PsH 253:1-2, RL 145:1-2, RN 57:1-2, TH 53:1-2, TWC 77:1-2, UMH 139:1-2

*Our Declaration of Trust and God's Greeting:

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, who do you trust?

Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Grace, mercy and peace to you

in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen!

*Response of Praise: "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" PH 482:3, PsH 253:3-4, RL 145:3-4, RN 57:3, 5, TH 53:3, 5, TWC 77:3, 4, UMH 139:3, 5

The Children's Moment

WE ARE RENEWED IN GRACE

The Call to Confession:

Because we trust in God's covenant faithfulness, we are free to make our confession to God and call for his compassion. Let us, therefore, confess our sins that we may be renewed in his grace.

The Prayer of Confession:

O Master, great and awesome God.

You never waver in your covenant commitment,
never give up on those who love you and do what you say.

Yet we have sinned in every way imaginable.

**We've done evil things, rebelled, dodged
and taken detours around your clearly marked paths.**

Compassion is our only hope,
the compassion of you, the Master, our God,
since in our rebellion we've forfeited our rights.

**Master, you are our God,
for you delivered your people from the land of Egypt
in such a show of power that
people are still talking about it!
We confess that we have sinned,
that we have lived bad lives.**

Turn your ears our way, God, and listen.
Open your eyes and take a long look at us,
your people named after you.

**We know that we don't deserve a hearing from you.
Our appeal is to your compassion.
This prayer is our last and only hope:**

Master, listen to us!

Master, forgive us!

Through Christ, your Lamb, our Lord. Amen. (adapted from Daniel 9 in *The Message*)

The Assurance of Pardon

The Gospel of Christ speaks to us of the pardon we may have through the finished work of Jesus Christ. Please rise for the reading of the Gospel.

(The worshipers rise.)

The reading of John 10:11-18

This is the Gospel of Christ.

Thanks be to God.

On the basis of the Gospel of Christ, we may be assured that our sins are forgiven for the sake of Christ.

Passing the Peace

The Peace of Christ be with you all.

And also with you.

(The worshipers greet each other saying, "The peace of Christ be with you".)

Our Grateful Affirmation:

I believe that every thing God reveals in his Word is true.

I also believe that true faith is not only a knowledge and conviction.

It is also a deep-rooted assurance,

created in me by the Holy Spirit through the gospel,

that, out of sheer grace earned for us by Christ,

not only others, but I too,

have had my sins forgiven,

have been made forever right with God,

and have been granted salvation. (from the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 21)

Song of Testimony: "When Peace Like a River" PsH 489:1, 3; TH 691:1, 3; TWC 519:1, 3; UMH 377:1, 3

God's Will for Grateful Living

GOD SPEAKS THROUGH HIS WORD

The Prayer for Illumination

The Scripture Reading: Psalm 91

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God!

Sermon: The Wings Of God

[Psalms for a Lenten Journey #4]

The Prayer of Application

WE RESPOND IN FAITH

*Song of Faith: "Children of the Heavenly Father" PsH 440:1-4, RL 585:1-4, TH 131:1-3, 5, TWC 84:1-4, UMH141:1-4
[seemusic notes]

The Prayers of the People

Anthem of Faith: "On Eagle's Wings", Wagner [see music notes]
or Song of Faith: "On Eagle's Wings" RN112, SNC185, WOV779, UMH143

The Offertory

Our Offering of Music: "On Eagle's Wings" [see music notes]

Our Offering of Gifts for.....

WE LEAVE WITH GOD'S PEACE

*The Benediction with Congregational **Amen!**

*Song of Faith: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" PH 376:1, 3, 4, PsH 568:1-3, RN 196:1-3, RL 464:1-3, TH 529:1, 3, 4,
TWC 558:1, 3, 4, UMH 384:1, 3, 4 [see music notes]

Postlude: "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling" [see music notes]

* You are invited to stand

* * * * *

Sermon: "The Wings of God"

by Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

Psalm 91:4 He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.

Many adults can recall a certain childhood feeling that has now pretty much faded away. When you are a child, you think like a child and feel like a child. When you are an adult, you put away childish things. Sorry to say, one of the things you put away is a childlike feeling of security in the nest. It's a sense that you are protected and perfectly safe. It's the sense that somebody else is in charge. In properly functioning homes, children often have this feeling. Adults do not, and they miss it.

Years ago, on the old Candid Camera TV program they interviewed a beefy truck driver—a man of about fifty. They asked him what age he would be if he could be any age he wanted. There was a silence for a while as the trucker thought it over. What was he thinking? Was he hankering for age 65 and retirement so he could trade his Kenworth four-and-a-

quarter semi tractor down to a John Deere riding lawnmower? Or was he yearning for age 18 and the chance to go back and take some turn he had missed?

The trucker thought it over. Suppose he could be any age he wanted. Finally, he turned to the interviewer and said that if it was up to him he'd like to be three. "Three? Why *three*?" the interviewer wanted to know. "Well," said the trucker, "when you're three you don't have any responsibilities."

When I first heard the interview I thought the man was trying to be cute. I now think he said something wistful. What he knew was that when you are a child, and if your family is running the right way, your burdens are usually small. You can go to bed without worrying about ice backup under your shingles. You don't wonder if the tingling in your leg might be a symptom of some exotic nerve disease. You don't wrestle half the night with a tax deduction you claimed, wondering whether some federal person might find it a little too creative. No, you squirm deliciously in your bed, comforted by the murmur of adult conversations elsewhere in the house. You hover wonderfully at the edge of slumber. Then you let go and fall away.

You dare to do this not only because you expect that in the morning you are going to be resurrected. You also dare to do it because you are sleeping under your parents' wing. If parents take proper care of you, you can give yourself up to sleep, because somebody else is in charge. Somebody big and strong and experienced. As far as a child knows, parents stay up all night, checking doors and windows, adjusting temperature controls, driving away marauders. They never go off duty. If a shadow falls over the house, or demons begin to stir, or a storm rises, parents will handle it. That's one reason children sleep so well. Their nest is sheltered and they love it, as they should.

I think children might be alarmed to discover how much adults crave this same sense of security. *Adults* need to be sheltered too. Some of us have been betrayed. Some of us have grown old and are not happy about it.

People get betrayed, or they get old or sick. Some are deeply disappointed that their lives have not turned out as they had hoped. Others have been staggered by a report that has just come back from a pathology lab. Still others are unspeakably ignored by people they treasure. Some are simply high-tension human beings, strung tight as piano wire.

To all such folk the psalmist speaks a word of comfort. It's one of the great themes of the Scriptures: *God is our shelter. He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.*

The image here is that of an eagle, or maybe a hen—in any case it's a picture of a bird that senses danger and then protectively spreads its wings over its young. An expert on birds once told me that this move is very common. A bird senses the approach of a predator, or the threat of something falling from above, and instinctively spreads out its wings like a canopy. Then the fledglings scuttle underneath for shelter. The move is so instinctive that an adult bird will spread those wings even when no fledglings are around!

And the Psalmist—who has almost surely seen this lovely thing happen—the Psalmist thinks of God. **He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.** The point is that God is our shelter when the winds begin to howl. The point is that under God's wings we are defended, protected, perfectly safe. The point is that someone else is in charge. Someone big, strong, and experienced. Someone who never goes off duty.

In one of his books John Timmer tells of his experience as a boy in the Netherlands at the start of World War II. German troops had invaded Holland a few days before, but nobody knew just what to expect. Then, on the second Sunday of May, 1940, as the Timmer family was sitting around the dinner table in their home in Haarlem, suddenly they heard the air-raid siren and then the droning of German bombers.

Of course, everybody was scared out of their minds. "Let's go stand in the hallway," John's father said. "They say it's the safest place in the house." In the hall John's father said, "Why don't we pray? There's nothing else we can do."

John Timmer writes he has long ago forgotten the exact wording of his father's prayer—all except for one phrase. Somewhere in that prayer, Mr. Timmer, who was praying God to protect his family from Hitler's Luftwaffe—somewhere in that prayer he said, "O God, in the shadow of your wings we take refuge."

It's a picture—God spreading his wings over us—it's a picture that all the Jewish and Christian generations have memorized and cherished, in part because the phrase invites us to recover our childhood feeling of security in the nest. Or, to discover it for the first time if we are working away from a terrorized childhood.

It's a special feeling and only a pretty numb Christian would fail to be touched by it.

Still, if you are thinking, one disturbing little question is pricking you. How *true* is the picture of a sheltering God? How secure *are* we in the nest? I wonder whether in 1940 on the second Sunday of May some other Dutch family begged God to spread his wings over their house. I wonder if the bombs of the German airforce pierced those wings and blew that house and its people to rubble.

You read Psalm 91, and you begin to wonder. It offers such comprehensive coverage. "He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge. You will not fear the terror of the night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that wastes at noonday."

Really? I need not fear any of these things? I can sleep in a dangerous neighborhood with my windows open? I shall not fear the terror of the night? My child's temperature soars, and his white blood count falls: I shall not fear the pestilence that stalks in darkness? I can plunge into my work at an AIDS clinic: I shall not fear the destruction that wastes at midday? Really? Is there a level of faith that can honestly say such things even after all allowance has been made for the fact that Psalm 91 is God's Word in poetry?

Let's face the truth. Faith in the sheltering wings of God does not remove physical danger or the need for precaution against it. We cannot ignore Middle East tourist advisories, or feed wild animals on our camping trips, or jump a hot motorcycle over a row of parked cars and trust God to keep us safe. We cannot smoke cigarettes like the Marlboro man and then claim the promises of Psalm 91 as our protection against lung cancer. A person who did these things would be a foolish believer and a foolish reader of Psalm 91.

You may recall that in Matthew's gospel Satan quotes Psalm 91 to Jesus in the temptation at the pinnacle of the temple. "Throw yourself down," says Satan. After all, it says right in Psalm 91 that God will give his angels charge over you. And Jesus replies that it is not right to put God to the test. It seems that God's protection is good only for certain events and restrictions may apply. Jesus was teaching us that we cannot act like a fool and then count on God to bail us out. God may do it—and some of us recall times when we acted like fools, and God bailed us out. But we cannot *count* on it.

And then, of course, some believers get hurt, terribly hurt, by no folly of their own. Suppose a drunk driver smashes into your family car. Suppose an I-beam falls in on you in a storm.

Or suppose you are a devout middle-aged Christian woman who lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan. One August you start not to feel very well. So you visit your primary care physician, who sends you for tests, and then a visit to a specialist, and then more tests. Finally you go back to your own physician, and he says "Ma'am, I'm sorry to say that you had better get

your affairs in order." He says more, far more, about treatments and research and making you as comfortable as possible—on and on with all kinds of stuff that is well-meant. But you have grown deaf. All you can think is that you are forty-six years old, and you are going to die before your parents do and before you have any grandchildren.

Whatever happened to the wings of God? Can you get brain cancer under those wings? Get molested by a family member? Get knifed by some emotionless teenager in a subway in New York? Can you find, suddenly one summer, that your own seventeen-year-old has become a stranger and that everything in your family seems to be cascading out of control?

Where are those wings?

I think that what troubles us is not so much the sheer fact that believers suffer along with everybody else. C.S. Lewis once pondered this. If the children of God were always saved from floods like believing Noah and his family; if every time somebody pointed a gun at a Christian, the gun just turned to salami; if we really had a money-back guarantee against hatred, disease, and the acts of terrorists, then of course we wouldn't have to worry about church growth. Our churches would fill with people attracted to the faith for its benefit plan. These are people who want an insurance agent, not a church. For security they want Arnold Schwarzenegger, not God. We *already* have people becoming Christians because they want to get rich or get happy. What would happen to people's integrity if becoming a believer really did give you blanket protection against poverty, accidents, and the wages of sin?

No, it's not the fact that we have to take our share of the world's suffering that surprises us. No, not that. Our experience and the rest of Scripture have taught us to *expect* hardship. *What worries us is that Psalm 91 tells us not to worry.* It says "a thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you." This is advertising that sounds too good to be true. In fact, the psalmist says, "Because you have made the Lord your refuge, *no* evil shall befall you." And the statement troubles us. What about Paul? What about Stephen? What about our Lord himself? He wanted to gather the citizens of Jerusalem as a hen gathers her chicks. And one day the soldiers took him outside the city and they nailed his wings to a cross.

So what is going on in Psalm 91? How are its extravagant promises God's Word to us?

What Psalm 91 does is to express *one*—one of the loveliest, one of the most treasured—but just *one* of the moods of faith. It's a mood of exuberant confidence in the sheltering providence of God. Probably the psalmist has been protected by God in some dangerous incident, and he is celebrating.

On other days, and in other moods—in other and darker seasons of his life—this same psalmist might have called to God out of despair and a sense of abandonment. Remember that when our Lord was crucified, when our Lord shouted at our God, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"—when Jesus shouted this in astonishment, and with maybe even a note of accusation, remember that he was quoting one of the Psalms (Psalm 22). Despair or astonishment at what can happen to us under God's providence—that too is natural and Biblical.

Psalm 91 gives us only part of the picture and only one of the moods of faith. With a kind of amazement the psalmist bears witness that under the wings of God good things happen to bad people. You need another psalm or two to fill in the picture and to cry out that under those same wings bad things sometimes happen to good people.

Psalm 91 says no evil shall befall us. When we have cashed out some of the poetry and then added in the witness of the rest of Scripture, what we get, I believe, is the conclusion that no *final* evil shall befall us. We all know that we can believe God with all our heart and yet have our heart broken by the loss of a child or the treachery of a spouse or the menace of a fatal disease. We know that. Everyone in this sanctuary knows that. And yet, generation after generation of saints have

known something else and spoken of it. In the mystery of faith we find a hand on us in the darkness, a voice that calls our name, and the sheer certainty that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God—not for this life and not for the life to come. We may be scarred and shaken, but, we are also loved.

We are like fledglings who scuttle under the wings of their parent. The forces of evil beat on those wings with everything they have. The pitchforks of the evil one, falling tree limbs in the storm, rain and hail—everything beats on those wings. When it is finished, when evil has done its worst, those wings are all bloodied and busted and hanging at wrong angles. And, to tell you the truth, in all the commotion we get roughed up quite a lot.

But no final evil can get to us because those wings have never folded. They are spread out to be wounded for our transgressions and bruised by our iniquities. And when the feathers quit flying, we peep out and discover that we have been in the only place that was not leveled. Yes, we have been bumped and bruised and hurt. Sometimes badly hurt. But the other choice was to be dead. I mean that the other choice was to break out of the embrace of God. The truth is that, if we had not stayed under those wings we could never have felt the body shudders and heard the groans of the one who loved us so much that those wings stayed out there no matter what came whistling in. This is the One who protects us from final evil, now and in the life to come—the life in which, at last, it is safe for God to fold his wings.

He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge. It's not a simple truth, but it is the truth. And we ought to believe it with everything that is in us.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

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Music Notes:

Glossary of Hymnal Abbreviations:

PH The Presbyterian Hymnal (Presbyterian Church USA; Westminster/John Knox Press)

PsH The Psalter Hymnal (Christian Reformed Church; Faith Alive Christian Resources)

RL Rejoice in the Lord (Reformed Church in America; W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company)

RN Renew! (Hope Publishing Company)

SFL Songs for LiFE (children's songbook; Faith Alive Christian Resources)

SNC Sing! A New Creation (Calvin Institute of Christian Worship, Christian Reformed Church, Reformed Church in America; Faith Alive Christian Resources)

TH Trinity Hymnal (Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church in America; Great Commission Publications)

TWC The Worshiping Church (Hope Publishing Company)

UMH The United Methodist Hymnal (United Methodist Publishing House)

WOV With One Voice (Augsburg Fortress)

The suggestions for prelude could be drawn from the following resources:

LOBE DEN HERREN [“Praise to the Lord, the Almighty”]

Organ:

Bach, J. S. *Six Organ Chorals* (Schubler, ed. Riemenschneider) Ditson [1952] (M-D)

Behnke, John. A. *Five Preludes of Praise*, set 4. Concordia 97-7039 [2003] (E-M)

Bender, Jan. *Festival Preludes on Six Chorales*. Concordia 97-4608 [1963] (M-D)

Bish, Diane. *The Diane Bish Organ Book*, vol. 1. Fred Bock B-G0548 [1980] (E-M)

Cherwien, David. *Interpretations*, bk. 2. AMSI OR-3 [1981] (M)
Cherwien, David. *Postludes on Well Known Hymns*. Augsburg 11-10795 [1997] (M)
Haan, Raymond H. *Four Hymns of Rejoicing*. Morningstar MSM-10-518 [1998] (E-M)
Honore, Jeffrey. *Classic Embellishments*. Augsburg 11-11005 [1999]
(E, includes optional instrumental parts)
Kerr, J. Wayne. *Prelude and Toccata on Praise to the Lord Almighty*. Flammer
HH504 [1986] (E-M)
Krapf, Gerhard. *Sing and Rejoice*, vol. 1. SMP KK234 [1978]
(E, could be adapted for piano)
Manz, Paul. *God of Grace*. Morningstar MSM-10-599 [2004] (M)
Manz, Paul. *Ten Chorale Improvisations*, set 2. Concordia 97-4656 [1964] (M)
Rotermund, Melvin. *Five Preludes*. Augsburg 11-6040 [1990] (E-M)
Shaw, Martin. *Processional*. Cramer APS 487 [1940] (M)
Shoemaker-Lohmeyer, Lisa. *Partita on Lobe den Herren*. Concordia 97-6144
[1992] (M-D)
Visser, Larry. *Four Chorale Preludes on Lobe den Herren*. Wayne Leupold Ed.
WL600064 [1996] (M-D)
Webber, Walter. *Trumpet Tune*. Ashdown [1956] (M)

Piano:

Gerig, Reginald. *Piano Preludes on Hymns and Chorales*. Hope 251 [1959] (M-D)
Wilhelmi, Teresa. *Hymns...Light Jazz Style*. Word 301 0136 315 [1997] (M)

Handbells:

McChesney, Kevin. *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*. Agape 1499 [1991]
(2-3 octaves, E-M)
Morris, Hart. *Let the Amen Sound*. Alfred 17544 [1998] (3-5 octaves, level 4)
Sanders, Patricia. *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty*. NMP HB-235 [1985]
(3 octaves, M)
Shaw, Martin/Wood, Dale. *Grand Processional on Lobe Den Herren*. SMP
S-HB62 [1990] (3-6 octaves with organ, M)
Wagner, Douglas E. *Festival Prelude on "Lobe den Herren."* Agape 1438 [1990]
(3-5 octaves, M)

Alternative harmonizations for the opening hymn can be found in the following collections:

Alternative Harmonization for Organ:

Ferguson, John. *Hymn Harmonizations for Organ*, bk. 1. Ludwig O-05 [1975]
Goode, Jack C. *Thirty-four Changes on Hymn Tunes*. H W Grey GB 644 [1978]
Wood, Dale. *New Settings of Twenty Well-Known Hymn Tunes*. Augsburg
11-9292 [1968]

Alternative Harmonization for Piano:

Organ, Anne Krentz. *Let It Rip! At the Piano*, vol. 2. Augsburg
ISBN 0-8006-7580-0 [2003]

Alternative harmonizations for "Children of the Heavenly Father" can be found in the following:

TRYGGARE KAN INGEN VARA ["Children of the Heavenly Father"]

Alternative Harmonization for Organ:

Burkhardt, Michael. *Seven Hymn Improvisations and Free Accompaniments*, set 1.

Morningstar MSM-10-847 [1992]

Eggert, John. *Creative Hymn Accompaniments for Organ*, vol. 2. CPH 97-6851 [2000]

Alternative Harmonization for Piano:

Organ, Anne Krentz. *Let It Rip! At the Piano*. Augsburg 11-11045 [2000]

The Anthem of Faith "On Eagle's Wings" by Michael Joncas is arranged for SATB voices and keyboard by Douglas Wagner. It is published by Hope A675 [1993] (E-M). You may wish to provide an instrumental arrangement of this song as offertory music. The worshipers can easily reflect on the text they have just heard or sung, letting it settle into their souls before worship concludes.

ON EAGLE'S WINGS ["On Eagle's Wings"]

Organ:

Callahan, Charles. *This Is the Feast*. CPH 97-6575 [1996] (E-M)

Piano:

Carter, John. *Today's Hymns and Songs for Piano*. Hope 244 [1995] (E-M)

Organ, Anne Krentz. *On Eagle's Wings*. Augsburg 11-10711 [1996] (M-D)

Handbells:

Honoré, Jeffrey. *On Eagle's Wings*. Concordia 97-6429 [1994] (3-5 octaves, E-M)

Alternative harmonizations for the closing hymn can be found in the following collections:

HYFRYDOL ["Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"]

Alternative Harmonization for Organ:

Ferguson, John. *Hymn Harmonizations for Organ*, bk. 1. Ludwig O-05 [1975]

Held, Wilbur. *Preludes and Postludes*, vol. 1. Augsburg 11-9318 [1972]

Alternative Harmonization for Piano:

Cherwien, David. *Let It Rip! At the Piano*. Augsburg 11-11045 [2000]

HYFRYDOL ["Love Divine, All Loves Excelling"]

Organ:

Barr, John G. *Processional Prelude on Hyfrydol*. H. W. Grey GSTC 01083 [1992] (M)

Coleman, Henry. *A Book of Hymn Tune Voluntaries*. Oxford ISBN 0-19-375115-1 [1950] (E-M)

Stearns, Peter Pindar. *Twelve Hymn Preludes for General Use*. Flammer HF-5145 [1987] (M)

Vaughan Williams, Ralph. *Augsburg Organ Library – Epiphany*. Augsburg 11-11073 [2001] (M)

Vaughan Williams, Ralph. *Three Preludes*. Galaxy (Stainer and Bell) (M)

Piano:

Wilson, John F. *A Sacrifice of Praise*. Hope 347 [1994] (E-M)

Handbells:

Crawshaw, Craig. *Hallelujah, What a Savior*. Jenson 469-08019 [1984] (3 octaves, E-M)

Honoré, Jeffrey. *Alleluia Passacaglia*. Agape 1552 [1992] (3-5 octaves, E-M)
Hopson, Hal. H. *Fantasy on "Hyfrydol"*. Agape 1048 [1982] (2 octaves, E-M)
Hopson, Hal. H. *Fantasy on "Hyfrydol"*. Agape 2078 [1999] (3-5 octaves, E-M)
Tucker, Sondra K. *Meditation on Hyfrydol*. Choristers Guild CGB-182 [1996] (3 octaves, E-M)

Liturgy Notes:

1. We encourage you to use the words of Psalm 91:1, 2 in the call to worship. Instead of reading the words without explanation, it will be helpful to point to the worship space and the worship time as a "safe place". Here, in the presence of God, we find a refuge that we have been unable to find anywhere in the world this week.

2. The Children's Moment is placed early in the service, assuming that many or some of them will be dismissed for their classes before the sermon. However, we encourage you to speak to them about the picture of security that this Psalm presents. Children are not strangers to fear. Nor are they unfamiliar with the security that is found in being held tightly by a parent in a time of danger. So they are also able to experience the security that the Psalm provides. While they may not be present for the sermon, they also need its message.

3. Review the comments from previous weeks about the standard form of the Service of Confession and Renewal for the Lenten season.

1 I owe this reference to James L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 296.

2 According to Jerome F. D. Creach (*Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, JSOT Supplement Series 217 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996], 94) Psalm 91 shares three important links with Psalm 90, which suggests that these two psalms were purposefully juxtaposed. The first link is that both psalms describe God as a "dwelling place" (Ps 90:1; Ps 91:9), which suggests that Ps 91 elaborates Ps 90:1. The second link is a contrast. Psalm 90 dwells on the shortness of human life; Psalm 91:16 promises longevity. The third link is that Psalm 91 functions as the answer to the concluding prayer of Psalm 90.

3 A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1951), 553-554. Cf. Gerald T. Sheppard, "Theology and the Book of Psalms," *Interpretation* 46 (1992): 151; Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, Hermeneia—A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, tr. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 432.

4 Cf. Ps 95:7-11.

5 Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, WBC 20 (Dallas: Word Book Publisher, 1990), 453.

6 Both vv. 1-2 and v. 9 use the divine names Most High and Lord; both also use the term "refuge."

7 Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 450-452.

8 The Targum already assigned different voices to the text. For an antiphonal arrangement of the various voices see: Franz Delitzsch, "Psalms," *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, tr. James Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 5:60-61.

9 Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 426.

10 Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 426.

11 Sheppard, "Theology and the Books of Psalms," 151.

12 Sheppard, "Theology and the Book of Psalms," 151.

13 Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge*, 94.

14 Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge*, 94.

15 Mays, *Psalms*, 296-297.

16 Sheppard, "Theology and the Book of Psalms," 149 and 151.

17 Mays, *Psalms*, 296.

18 Mays, *Psalms*, 296.

19 Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge*, 51-55. Cf. Ps 5:2, 12.

20 Cf. Dt 32:11-12; Pss 5:11-12; 17: 8; 36:7: 57:1; 61:4; and 63:7. For the image of a mother bird in Egyptian iconography see: Otto Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*, tr. T. J. Hallet (New York: Seabury, 1978), 191-192.

21 Walter Brueggemann (*The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], 156-157) observes that the basic metaphors in Psalm 91 deal with a safe *place* (vv. 1-4 and 9-10) and a safe *journey* (vv. 5-6 and 11-13).

22 For the problems see: Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, 448-449.

23 This verb may denote a man's attraction for a woman (Gen 34:8; Dt 21:11) or even God's attraction to Israel (Dt 7:5; 10:15).

24 For "my name" see the extended note by John H. Stek on Psalm 5:11 in the *NIV Study Bible*.

25 Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 361.

26 Stek, *NIV Study Bible*, 802.

27 For those who employ PowerPoint in their sermon delivery the images in Keel's *The Symbolism of the Biblical World*, 191-192, might prove to be useful.

28 Sheppard, "Theology and the Book of Psalms," 151.

29 Sheppard, "Theology and the Book of Psalms," 151.

30 Mays, *Psalms*, 297.

31 Mays, *Psalms*, 297.

32 Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship*, 305.

33 J. Clinton McCann, 1048.

34 Kirkpatrick, "The Psalms," 553; William A. VanGemeren, "Psalms," *The Expositor's Bible*, Frank E. Gaebelien, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 5: 598; Zenger, *Psalms 2*, 432.

35 Carl J. Bosma, "Triple A (AAA) Assurance from Psalm 121," *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum* 10 (2003): 7-8.

36 J. David Pleins, *The Psalms: Songs of Tragedy, Hope and Justice* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 45-46.

37 Pleins, *The Psalms*, 46.

38 Pleins, *The Psalms*, 46.

39 Pleins, *The Psalms*, 49.

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