

## BOOK OF PSALMS

The Old Testament Books of the Holy Bible is the story of the Jewish people. First, a brief explanation about the word 'story'. In the English language there are two words, history and story. History is based on historical facts accepted by historians as to their authenticity because they meet certain academic requirement. A story may have facts but does not rely on their authenticity. It has an underlying moral truth that it wishes to emphasis differing from a myth which is basically a nice story. The Old Testament began in an oral form, that is it was transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth by storytellers, then later put into written form by writers of various schools of thoughts writings that became known as 'codes'. These, the oral and written traditions, were entrusted to men knowledgeable to their contents who conveyed them to their people. They were the priests of the Old Testament period. It is a role similar to that of a lawyer, versed in the legal aspects of the law, who uses his knowledge to the benefit of his client. The process of all the books becoming one book, the Old Testament and later the New Testament, still is unknown and can only be understood as an act of God as directed by His divine providence. The historical events, more or less, began with Abraham, a man chosen by God Who had him leave his ancestral family in Ur to begin a new life with his own family. These were the 'Chosen People of God' called to go and settle in a land to be called the 'Promised Land'. Years later they are found living in Egypt under the rule of the Pharaohs. God selects a man from them, Moses to lead them out of bondage in the great emancipation of the Jewish people celebrated by them each year as the Passover...the passing over the Red Sea into the Sinai Peninsula. It is there that Moses receives the Law, mainly the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai, and where the priesthood amongst the Jewish people began. The priesthood was entrusted to the care of Moses' brother, Aaron, and men of the tribe of Levi to whom both Moses and Aaron belonged. After the deaths of Moses and Aaron, the 12 tribes of the Jewish people entered the Promised Land where eventually a kingship was formed headed by men from the smallest of the tribes, Benjamin. One of them Saul, lost his reign to Jesse (Isai) the Bethlhemite, the father of the Prophet King David, who is considered to be the greatest of their kings and the author of the Book of Psalms. I Samuels (Chapter 16) tells how the kingship of Israel was taken from Saul and passed on to Jesse. This can also be seen in one of our church hymnals, in the melody sung on the feast of Nativity where it states...'A new flower buds forth this day from the root of Jesse (Isai), and bears the Son of God as the Son of David'. As recorded in the Gospel of St. Luke (2:4,5) Joseph was a Bethlhemite and from the lineage of David, the son of Jesse (Isai).

If David didn't write all of the Psalms, he was the author of most of them with the remainders being written in the spirit of those composed by him. Found in the middle of all the books composing the Old Testament, the Psalms are the heartbeat and soul of the Old Covenant. They present the reality of man's condition as depraved, helpless and hopeless

when separated from his creator and the magnanimous spirit of the unbound merciful love of God in His act of reconciliation with them. This is made possible by Jesus of Nazareth, whom we Christians consider to be the Christ, that is, the Anointed one of God and whom we profess to be the Only-Begotten Son of God. The Psalms may have been intentionally placed in the middle of the books of the Old Testament to serve as a reminder to all, that the intent of God's action was for the salvation of His children, members of the human race who were in an inescapable and eternal servile submission to the will of Satan and the forces of evil. In a sense, the Psalms serves as eyes for the reader and participants in services to see in a proper perspective the will of God in His creative act as a divine redemptive act foreseen in His Divine Providence. This message is brought into the New Testament and services of the Christian church underscoring once again the incomprehensible nature of the mysteries of God's unbound merciful love. Psalms are utilized extensively in the services of our church, especially during Holy Week. The readings always end with the phrase of, 'Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always and unto the ages of ages.' thereby bringing the Old Testament into the life of the New Testament world, making the 'old Adam' anew by the new Adam Jesus Christ. At the beginning of the worship service of Divine Liturgy it is noteworthy to observe that in the Deacon's bidding a call is made to the congregation to... 'Sing psalms to the Lord God...'. This is done immediately before the singing of the Hagiody, the song sung during the Great Entrance. This same phrase is again said with some added phrases before the singing of the Song of Praise... 'Christ is sacrificed (Krisdos Badarakial.); also when the priest celebrating the Divine Liturgy presents the consecrated bread and wine as the body and blood of our Lord Jesus, and states that they are... 'the life, hope of resurrection, propitiation and remission of sins' and calls on the congregation to 'Sing psalms unto the Lord our God, sing psalms unto our Heavenly King.' In the process, a new attitude is formed that began with David and completed in his off-shoot Jesus of Nazareth

"Sing psalms unto the Lord and God, ye clerks, spiritual hymns in a sweet voice. For unto him are befitting psalms and praises, alleluias and spiritual songs. Ye ministers, sing psalms together with hymns, and praise the Lord in heaven"...is intoned by the Deacon during the Divine Liturgy worship service immediately prior to the hymn of Communion. It may have been inspired by the exhortation of the Apostle Paul to the Colossians (3:16)..."Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing with thanksgiving in your hearts to God."

Songs and singing are a very important part of our lives. When did the first humans begin to sing? When was that blissful moment that moved one to want to express in melodic tune an inner joyful experience? All nations of people have their songs and particular melodic modes that they become identified with. Many songs arising from our Armenian ancestry is associated with nature. There is an affinity between the soul and the soil as demonstrated

by those songs that have come from the tiller or cultivator of the ground, those farmers living in the villages away from the businesses of the busy urban areas. His was a long day, from sunrise to sunset, and his was not an easy task. But song helped the burden of the day become much lighter, similar to words of our Lord..."For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:30) This can be seen in all areas of life....in offices or work places, while one is exercising or jogging, for a person lying sick in a hospital bed, songs are a remedy for the ills and hardships of life. The Armenian farmer sang songs to the rivers, the lakes, the mountains and valleys, the sun and the heavens, the soil and harvest. It was song to the Grand Creator and Designer of Life, a life full of uncertainties and upheavals, the discords which resolve into a beautiful harmonious whole in the hands of the Master.