

## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### LECTIONARY #7

READING I Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10

#### A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

The desert and the parched land will exult;  
the steppe will rejoice and bloom.

They will **bloom** with abundant **flowers**,  
and **rejoice** with joyful **song**.

The **glory** of Lebanon will be given to them,  
the **splendor** of Carmel and Sharon;  
they will see the glory of the LORD,  
the splendor of our God.

Strengthen the hands that are **feeble**,  
make firm the knees that are **weak**,  
**say** to those whose hearts are **frightened**:  
**Be strong, fear not!**

**Here** is your God,  
he comes with vindication;  
with divine **recompense**  
**he** comes to save you.

Then will the eyes of the **blind** be opened,  
the ears of the **deaf** be cleared,  
then will the lame leap like a stag,  
then the **tongue** of the mute will **sing**. >>

Isaiah = Ī-ZAY-uh

Smile as you proclaim this reading. Articulate your words.

Lebanon = LEB-uh-nuhn

Carmel = KAHR-m\*ī

Sharon = SHAYR-uhn

Let the congregation hear strength in your voice. "Be strong, fear not!"

Proclaim slowly.

Read with joy. Build intensity.

**READING I** Isaiah's vivid prophecy promises an extraordinary renewal of land and people. In the preceding chapter, Isaiah describes the fruitful land of Israel's enemy turned into a desert wasteland; in today's reading, he presents an opposite scenario: the parched land becoming fruitful. Isaiah develops this prophecy in three stages: image of a desert transformed; direct address to God; direct address to the people, with promise of human restoration.

The opening imagery is of a desert personified: the parched land will exult, the

steppe will rejoice, and the desert will rejoice with joyful song. Isaiah's promise of the earth itself participating in praising God has psalm-like poetry: "Let the rivers clap their hands, the mountains shout with them for joy" (Psalm 98:8). The land has great cause for such rejoicing, for the southern desert will receive the abundant growth associated with the northern fruitfulness of Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon. The land will see God's own glory, the tangible weight of God's power and presence.

Having described a fecund transformation of the desert, Isaiah then speaks

directly to God, or perhaps a divine messenger. Knowing the suffering of the people, Isaiah asks that God strengthen their feeble hands and weakened knees. The God who can bring about life in the desert is also able to heal whatever suffering afflicts God's own people. Asking that God say to frightened hearts "Be strong, fear not," has a twofold significance: the people themselves must be strong in the face of adversity, and they should know well that God abides with them, "Fear not, I am with you" (Isaiah 41:10).

Smile as you read this last sentence. Take your time. Wonderful news!

Zion = zī-uhn or zī-ahn

For meditation and context:

Those whom the LORD has ransomed **will** return  
and enter Zion **singing**,  
crowned with everlasting joy;  
they will meet with joy **and** gladness,  
sorrow **and** mourning will **flee**.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 146:6–7, 8–9, 9–10 (Isaiah 35:4)

R. Lord, come and save us.

or

R. Alleluia.

The LORD God keeps faith forever,  
secures justice for the oppressed,  
gives food to the hungry.  
The LORD sets captives free.

The LORD gives sight to the blind;  
the LORD raises up those who were  
bowed down.

The LORD loves the just;  
the LORD protects strangers.

The fatherless and the widow he sustains,  
but the way of the wicked he thwarts.  
The LORD shall reign forever;  
your God, O Zion, through all generations.

READING II James 5:7–10

A reading from the Letter of Saint James

Be patient, brothers and sisters,  
until the **coming** of the Lord.  
See how the **farmer** waits for the **precious fruit** of the earth,  
being **patient** with it  
until it receives the early and the late rains.  
**You** too must be **patient**.  
Make your hearts firm,  
because the **coming** of the Lord is **at hand**.

Pause after "Be patient."

Continue to read as one sentence.

Say this line firmly with good eye contact.

Proclaim slowly.

In the third movement of his prophecy, Isaiah announces that God does indeed come to save the people. The future will bring an opening of the eyes of the blind, a clearing of the ears of the deaf, and an empowering of the lame to leap. Along with the land that will sing, the mute too will sing. In verses omitted from today's reading, Isaiah returns to the image of the transformed earth, where God will open a highway through the desert for the redeemed to walk. Transformed people will walk on transformed land, as those ran-

somed by the Lord will enter Zion with joy and gladness.

**READING II** The Letter of James is an extended exhortation, reading like a lengthy sermon that urges believers to persevere in the face of trials and testing. The audience, identified as "the twelve tribes of the dispersion," may refer to Jewish believers scattered throughout the Mediterranean world. More broadly, the audience includes all Christians who strive to live in patient fidel-

ity to the belief they profess, whether in the first century or today.

The overarching theme of today's reading is patience. James urges patience specifically "until the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord." From the beginning, Christians have believed in Christ's coming again in glory, his *parousia*. While there is certainty in Christ's future coming, there has never been certainty as to when it will happen. Because the *parousia* may be soon, or may be in the far distant future, James urges the community to wait in patience.

A command on how we should act. Proclaim with firmness.

Proclaim in an authoritative tone.

Use a firm but gentle tone. Take your time.

Blessed = BLES-uhd

Pause after each question and use strong eye contact.

Do not complain, brothers and sisters, about one another, that **you may not be judged**.  
Behold, the Judge is standing before the gates.  
Take as an example of hardship and patience, brothers and sisters, the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

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GOSPEL Matthew 11:2-11

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew**

When **John** the Baptist heard in prison of the works of the Christ, he sent his disciples to Jesus with this question,  
"Are you the one who is to come, or should we look for another?"  
Jesus said to them in reply,  
"Go and tell John what you hear and see:  
the blind regain their sight,  
the lame walk,  
lepers are cleansed,  
the deaf hear,  
the dead are raised,  
and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them.  
And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me."  
As they were going off,  
Jesus began to speak to the crowds about **John**,  
"What did you go out to the desert to see?  
A reed swayed by the wind?  
Then what did you go out to see?  
Someone dressed in fine clothing?  
Those who wear fine clothing are in royal palaces. >>

In using the analogy of the farmer, the only actions that James mentions are waiting and being patient. Yet the farmer's unspoken actions are also important. The farmer works diligently in preparing the soil, sowing the seed, and tending the crop all season long. For the coming rains to be effective, the ground must be ready to receive it. So too those who wait patiently are to be actively engaged in living in accord with the faith they profess. Present actions prepare the person to be ready for the Lord's future coming. James' entire letter advises such active and ethical living. In

this reading, he looks at relationships within the community: "Do not complain about one another." Patience with one another is another way of being patient for the Lord's coming.

Along with the farmer as an image of patience, James sees the Hebrew prophets as an example both of hardship and patience. They waited long years for God to intervene. In the verse after today's reading, James adds Job as another example of perseverance. Since even God is steadfast and patient according to the Bible, (e.g.,

Romans 15:5; 1 Peter 3:20), Christian patience is modeled after God's own.

**GOSPEL**

While John the Baptist was imprisoned, he heard about Jesus' activities throughout Galilee. Although Matthew identified Jesus as "the Christ" in his first verse, John himself wants to know if Jesus is indeed the "one who is to come." John had earlier described the one coming after him in graphic imagery: he would gather wheat into his barn and burn the chaff with unquenchable fire (3:12). This expectation of the coming one