

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

The tone of this reading is set by the early repetitions of "rejoice" and "bloom."

Lebanon = LEB-uh-nuhn

Carmel = KAHR-m*1

Sharon = SHAYR-uhn

Note the shift into imperatives: "strengthen," "make," and "say."

Slight pause between "lame" and "leap."

READING I

The thirty-fifth chapter of the Book of Isaiah serves as something of a bridge between First and Second Isaiah. (Scholars typically divide the Book of Isaiah into three main parts, First, Second, and Third Isaiah.) While it continues much of the deliverance material found in the first part of Isaiah, the chapter introduces a theme that will be significant throughout Second Isaiah, namely, the people's journey home after exile. What is portrayed here is a world transformed. Isaiah's prophecy presents a series of grand reversals, images that demonstrate God's power

to rejuvenate and fully restore his deflated people.

The desert, through which the people sojourn on their way back to Judea, has been made abundantly beautiful with foliage and the joyful song of the pilgrims. As the Israelites take possession of the land once again, the cities of Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon radiate God's glory. This stands in stark contrast to Isaiah's earlier description, in which he referred to Lebanon as withering and Sharon as a wasteland (see Isaiah 33:9).

Such images of renewal will certainly make strong hands that are weak and hearts that are frightened. Isaiah calls out to the people as they make their way back home: "Be strong, fear not!" He continues by making clear that God is not blessing his people from a distance. Just as he guided his people through the desert after ratifying the covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai, so now God comes into their midst to save them. At his coming, blind eyes will see, deaf ears will hear, the lame will leap, and all those who return to Jerusalem will sing a song that will serve to overturn

Zion = Zī-uhn or Zī-ahn
Slight pause between "Zion" and "singing."

TO KEEP IN MIND

Smile when you share good news.
Nonverbal cues like a smile help the assembly understand the reading.

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 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.

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.

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.**

Do not **complain, brothers and sisters,** about one **another,**
that you may **not** be **judged.**

Behold, the Judge is **standing** before the **gates. »**

The tone of this reading is gentle.

Note the repetitions of "patient."

The tone becomes firmer in the second half of the reading; allow your proclamation to reflect this shift.

"sorrow and mourning" with "joy and gladness." Isaiah beautifully portrays the redeemed people successfully entering the gates of Jerusalem, and he proclaims the people "crowned with everlasting joy." Without directly saying so, how foolish it would be to resist God's call to return home!

READING II

Some scholars believe the Letter of St. James to have been written somewhere between the years AD 65 and 85, well after the letters written by the apostle Paul. Scholars liken the letter to wisdom literature as it con-

tains a variety of loosely connected moral exhortations. Much of the material bears a great similarity to the sayings of Jesus found in Matthew and Luke that are attributed to the Q source. The bulk of these exhortations are oriented to turning people away from the ways of the world to seeking the wisdom of heaven, where injustice and poverty have no home.

The word *patience* occurs three times in today's short excerpt from the letter. The author exhorts his audience to have the patience of a farmer who has great expectations for the sprouting and growth of the

seeds that he has planted. The patience James calls for is not mere waiting but is a sort of hopeful yearning. There is much hope that the wait will be worth all that is to come. James encourages those who wait patiently to make firm their hearts. Thus, they are not to be distracted by other alluring forces of this world that may draw their attention away from the Lord's return, which "is at hand."

In a state of expectant waiting, it is possible that someone could become impatient with and cast judgment upon those uninterested in waiting. James cautions

Take as an example of hardship and patience, **brothers**
and **sisters**,
the **prophets** who **spoke** in the **name** of the **Lord**.

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**.

The tone in this narrative reading is urgent.

Note the pairs: “blind” and “sight,” “lame”
and “walk,” and so forth.

Slight pause between “good news” and
“proclaimed.”
blessed = BLES-uhd

Jesus offers a series of urgent questions
by way of setting up his praise of John
the Baptist.

against the temptation to complain about others and suggests that it will reverse the judgment upon the one who complains. Instead, those who await the Lord’s return should look to the example provided by the prophets. The suffering and the hardship of those who attend to the Lord will not be long lasting but will yield the “precious fruit of the earth,” the state of a world redeemed and living in the justice of God.

GOSPEL

The animated discussion between the disciples of John the Baptist and Jesus embodies the early Church’s struggle to understand the nature of Jesus as the messiah. The disciples of John would have been committed men who were radically concerned with the dawning of God’s kingdom and wanted to stir up a spirit of repentance among the people. Matthew chose these dedicated disciples to be the ones who prompt Jesus to reveal the nature and purpose of his mission. They serve the role of verifying the authority of Jesus at a crucial juncture in

Matthew’s Gospel, for in the previous chapter Jesus commissions the twelve apostles to go out into the world in his name, and now in chapter 11, Jesus begins to face controversy, especially the challenge waged by the Pharisees.

When John’s disciples ask Jesus point-blank whether or not he is “the one who is to come,” Jesus does not answer with a straightforward yes or no. Instead, he points to the results of his ministry. This list is not to be taken lightly: the blind see, the crippled walk, the sick are healed, the deaf hear, and the dead are raised to new life.

Slight pause between "way" and "before."

Emphasis on "none greater."

Then **why** did you go **out**? To see a **prophet**?

Yes, I tell you, and **more** than a prophet.

This is the one about whom it is written:

***Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;
he will prepare your way before you.***

Amen, I say to you,

among those **born of women**

there has been **none greater** than **John the Baptist**;

yet the **least** in the kingdom of **heaven** is **greater** than he."

Jesus concludes the list with the statement: "And blessed is the one who takes no offense at me." This suggests that he knows how an influential segment of the population will soon reject his ministry. Jesus manifests a messiah who is compassionate and just; this is far different from the image of the messiah popularized by the religious establishment of that day. The type of messiah Jesus describes is also different from the one John predicted (Matthew 3:10), who was full of judgment and power.

As the disciples of John depart—seemingly satisfied by their encounter with Jesus—Jesus turns to the crowds and asks what they saw when they witnessed John's preaching in the desert. At first, he suggests that perhaps they went out to see someone dressed in fine clothes, a kingly figure. Yet they certainly did not encounter this quality in John. Perhaps his prophetic preaching intrigued them. If so, Jesus tells them that they encountered "more than a prophet" in John. Jesus calls John the greatest of "those born of women." Nevertheless, Jesus states

that "the least in the kingdom of heaven" are even greater than John. Who are the least? They are the ones who have been touched by encounter with Jesus, they are his disciples, they are the ones who take no offense at what he does. They are the ones who have been born into the kingdom of heaven. S.W.