

## ADVENT: A TIME OF HOPEFUL EXPECTATION

**Third Sunday of Advent**  
**December 16, 2007**

**Isaiah 35:1-10**  
**Psalm 146:5-10**  
**James 5:7-10**  
**Matthew 11:2-11**

### **Building Hope with Bricks of Justice**

“Thirsty deserts will be glad; barren lands will celebrate and blossom with flowers!”  
(Isaiah 35:1, *CEV*).

Many of these Advent texts are filled with joyful hope. This hope looks ahead to God’s arrival and sees the world transformed. And it is a lovely, long-awaited vision. Water in the desert. The blind restored to sight, and the lame leaping about like deer in this newly blooming land. A fair shake to the poor, food to the hungry, and liberation to those in bondage (Psalm 146:7). This is a vision worth waiting for, long-expected, long-desired.

The prophecies in Isaiah seem to be fulfilled in this man Jesus, whose actions live out the prophet’s promise. God is here, and God’s presence among us is manifested in healing. Hallelujah!

This is a wonderful vision. And we may feel very comfortable in looking forward to this. Who wouldn’t? “I’m a good person,” people long to say, and don’t good people deserve a world like this, a world filled with only good things?

In our eagerness to imagine ourselves in that promised land, I fear we may rush headlong past God’s “message for all who are weak, trembling, and worried: ‘Cheer up! Don’t be afraid. Your God is coming to punish your enemies. God will take revenge on them and rescue you’” (Isaiah 35:3,4, *CEV*).

Without this statement we might be off in a cartoon fantasy, where all these hopes are realized by magic. In the world we know, the poor do not get justice. The hungry do not find a three course dinner on their doorstep – except perhaps at Thanksgiving or Christmas. And God forbid if any prisoner is released without paying every last measure of their “debt to society.”

This prophecy is not for the nice or the good, but for the weak, trembling, and worried. In order to be a God of deliverance, God must defeat those who bring about the weakness, the insecurity, the fear.

In the world we know, in *this* world, in *God's* world, we know that prisoners leave jail early only in case of revolution – or mercy. We know that food for the hungry really means work and opportunity. And we know that justice for the poor requires a good fight against the powerful.

We might hope that God's sacred highway will magically appear in the wilderness. Yet in the world we know, in *God's* world, yellow bricks do not march themselves to the desert and form themselves into a road. Roads must be built. And there are often powerful interests who prefer that the country be wild and dangerous – or at a minimum insist that they own the road with a steep toll.

Yet God's sacred highway has already been built and is being added to daily. The construction occurred when a poor man gathered a few followers to share bread. The dedication took place with blood and suffering on a cross. And the ribbon cutting ceremony happened when the stone to the tomb was rolled away.

Make no mistake: that vision of deserts springing into bloom is not a vision of a heavenly Las Vegas, but a vision of God's mercy and justice irrigating the world.

The benefits of this construction project are available to all. It's great if you can lend a hand, marching on this sacred highway, helping with the maintenance, extending the road into new territory. But it is critically important to not get in the way. Jesus said, "God will bless everyone who doesn't reject me because of what I do" (Matthew 11:6, *CEV*).

This week's Reflection was prepared by Paul Bellan-Boyer, a member of St. Matthew Lutheran Church in Jersey City, NJ. He coordinates housing programs for the Jersey City Episcopal Community Development Corporation, and is active in the New Jersey Regional Coalition's efforts to move state policy in the direction of justice.

+ + +

**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Georgia** – With thanks to God that the Holy Scriptures have become accessible to many new readers, and with prayers for peace and for comfort for the hundreds of thousands of refugees in the country; **Azerbaijan** – With thanks to God for successful Scripture distribution and with prayers for the success of the *Faith Comes By Hearing* project, for those who lead Bible work, and for the publishing team as it prepares literature; **Armenia** – With thanks to God for the generosity of supporters and that a large range of activities and products have been made available, and with prayers for plans for new translations, new tools for studying, new training programs, and for work in orphanages, old people's homes, and among members of the armed forces.

**Activity Corner:** "Waiting for Jesus with a Heart Filled with JOY"

Supplies needed: Bible; Bible Concordance; small notebook or writing paper; pen/pencil.

The theme for the third week of Advent is JOY. Look up the word JOY in a Bible Concordance and then look up several Bibles passages that contain the word. How is joy

expressed in each passage? Consider keeping an Advent Journal to record your thoughts and reflections. At the end of the week, prepare a prayer that incorporates your thoughts. Share your prayer with members of your household during a time of family devotion.

Throughout the Advent season, gather with members of your household and reflect daily on Christ's Advent – his coming on Christmas as a baby in Bethlehem, his coming to you each day through the Holy Scriptures and prayer, and his promise to come again at the close of the age. The Bible readings for Advent remind us to remain alert and faithful as we prepare for and await our Lord's coming. If you are using an Advent Wreath, light the first three candles prior to the Scripture reading for the day.

Sunday	Luke 1:1-25
Monday	Luke 1:26-38
Tuesday	Luke 1:39-56
Wednesday	Luke 1:57-80
Thursday	Philippians 4:4-9
Friday	Isaiah 55:1-13
Saturday	Psalm 126

Conclude each day's reading with prayer and singing the first three verses of "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" or one of your favorite Advent carols.