



## THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

### FIRST READING: Isaiah 35:1-10

A reading from Isaiah.

<sup>1</sup>The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
like the crocus <sup>2</sup>it shall blossom abundantly,  
and rejoice with joy and singing.  
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
They shall see the glory of the LORD,  
the majesty of our God.

<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.  
<sup>4</sup>Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
“Be strong, do not fear!  
Here is your God.  
He will come with vengeance,  
with terrible recompense.  
He will come and save you.”

<sup>5</sup>Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
<sup>6</sup>then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.  
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,  
and streams in the desert;  
<sup>7</sup>the burning sand shall become a pool,  
and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

<sup>8</sup>A highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
the unclean shall not travel on it,  
but it shall be for God’s people;  
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. ▶

---

**FIRST READING** *Isaiah = eye-ZAY-uh Carmel = CAR-mul Sharon = SHAR-un*

The tone of the reading is upbeat. The wilderness and the dry land “shall be glad.” The reader will do well to bring a confident and optimistic voice to the reading. (A happy face underscores an optimistic voice!) Note carefully the promise in verses 5 and 6 that “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.” Jesus will make reference to this text in the gospel, and you will want to make certain the hearers in the congregation still have these words of promise from the prophet ringing in their memory.

<sup>9</sup>No lion shall be there,  
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
they shall not be found there,  
but the redeemed shall walk there.  
<sup>10</sup>And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
and come to Zion with singing;  
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The word of the Lord.            *or*            Word of God, word of life.

**PSALMODY: Psalm 146:5-10 or Luke 1:46b-55**

**SECOND READING: James 5:7-10**

A reading from James.

<sup>7</sup>Be patient, therefore, beloved,  
until the coming of the Lord.  
The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth,  
being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains.  
<sup>8</sup>You also must be patient.  
Strengthen your hearts,  
for the coming of the Lord is near.

<sup>9</sup>Beloved, do not grumble against one another,  
so that you may not be judged.  
See, the Judge is standing at the doors!  
<sup>10</sup>As an example of suffering and patience, beloved,  
take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

The word of the Lord.            *or*            Word of God, word of life.

---

**SECOND READING**

The reading is an appeal for patience. With the exception of verse 9 (which changes the mood by painting a picture of the imminent arrival of the Judge, who is standing at the door!) these verses will profit from a carefully paced, patient tone. Take your time.

## **GOSPEL: Matthew 11:2-11**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

<sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing,  
he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him,

“Are you the one who is to come,  
or are we to wait for another?”

<sup>4</sup>Jesus answered them,

“Go and tell John what you hear and see:

<sup>5</sup>the blind receive their sight, the lame walk,  
the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear,

the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.

<sup>6</sup>And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

<sup>7</sup>As they went away,

Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John:

“What did you go out into the wilderness to look at?

A reed shaken by the wind?

<sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see?

Someone dressed in soft robes?

Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces.

<sup>9</sup>What then did you go out to see?

A prophet?

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

<sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written,

‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
who will prepare your way before you.’

<sup>11</sup>Truly I tell you, among those born of women

no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist;

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

The gospel of the Lord.

---

### **GOSPEL**

In two distinct episodes, the gospel presents a marvelous portrait of John. Help the assembly sense John’s uncertainty as well as our Lord’s blessed assurance. Separate the episodes with a healthy pause. Allow a moment for each of Jesus’ rhetorical questions in verses 7–9 to hang in the air a moment before proceeding. This is too rich a text to rush.