

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth  
Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022  
Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Joy in Christ  
Advent Week 3  
Isaiah 35:1-10**

**Welcome**

Brothers and Sisters in Christ  
as we enter this season of Advent,  
may the love of God the Father,  
and the grace of Jesus the Son,  
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be and abide with us all.

**Announcements**

**Call to Worship**

Show us your unfailing love, O God, our Savior,  
**and grant us your salvation.**

Listen to what the Lord our God says:  
**He promises peace to his people,  
who are his beloved saints.**

The Lord will indeed give what is good.  
**Righteousness goes before him  
and prepares the way for his steps.**

May the Lord make his holy face to shine upon us  
in this time of Advent worship.  
May we see God's face and so know peace.  
**Amen.**

**Prayer of Adoration and Invocation**

**Advent Candle Lighting**

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world;  
the one who follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life."

**We light this candle as a sign of the coming light of Christ.**

*[Candle Lighter]*

The LORD says to his servant,  
 “It is too light a thing that you should be my servant  
 to raise up the tribes of Jacob  
 and to restore the survivors of Israel;  
 I will give you as a light to the nations,  
 that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”  
 —from Isaiah 49:6, NRSV

Come, Lord Jesus, our light, and our salvation.

**Let us walk in the light of the Lord**

**Opening Hymn #119: “Hope is a Star”**

Hope is a star that shines in the night,  
 leading us on till the morning is bright.

Refrain:

When God is a child there's joy in our song.  
 The last shall be first and the weak shall be strong,  
 and none shall be afraid.

Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth,  
 giving a promise of safety and worth.

Joy is a song that welcomes the dawn,  
 telling the world that the Saviour is born.

**Call to Confession**

Prepare the way of the Lord!  
 Let us make our confession to God.

**Prayer of Confession**

**O promised Christ:  
 We are a world at war.  
 Our peace depends on your coming.  
 We are a sinful people.  
 Our pardon depends on your coming.  
 We are full of good intentions but weak at keeping promises;  
 our only hope of doing God's will  
 is that you should come and help us do it.  
 Lord Christ, Word made flesh,**

our world waits  
 for your peace,  
 for your pardon,  
 and for your grace.  
 Even so: come, Lord Jesus. Amen

### **Assurance of Pardon**

Almighty God, by whose providence  
 our Savior, Jesus Christ, came among us in great humility,  
 will sanctify you with the light of his blessing and set you free from all sin

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.  
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
 Give us this day our daily bread.  
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.  
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.  
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,  
 Forever and ever. Amen.**

### **Music Ministry: "He Will Come" by Choir**

### **Responsive Reading**

#### **100. What are the Ten Commandments?**

The Ten Commandments are God's law for the direction of our lives. They teach us our covenant responsibility to God and to our neighbour.

Deut 6:1-2, Mk 12:29-31

#### **Question 101. How are the Ten Commandments introduced?**

They are introduced with the words, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). God freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt and gave them this great charter of freedom. They were to stand firm in the new liberty purchased for them. The introduction also makes clear that God's grace always precedes God's demand.

Ex 15:1, Deut 6:21, 24

### **Children's Hymn #149: "Away In A Manger"**

Away in a manger, no crib for a bed,  
 the little Lord Jesus laid down his sweet head.  
 The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay,  
 the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes,

but little Lord Jesus no crying he makes.  
I love you, Lord Jesus! Look down from the sky,  
and stay by my side until morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask you to stay  
close by me forever, and love me, I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in your tender care,  
and fit us for heaven to live with you there.

### **Children's Lesson**

#### **Prayer for illumination** **(Congregant Prepared)**

#### **Scripture**

##### **Isaiah 35:1-10**

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 have an anxious heart,  
"Be strong; fear not!  
Behold, your God  
will come with vengeance,  
with the recompense of God.  
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 shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.  
For waters 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;  
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

**<sup>8</sup> And a highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;  
the unclean shall not pass over it.  
It shall belong to those who walk on the way;  
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.  
<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 gladness and joy,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.**

### **Sermon**

Imagine utopia in the desert, a place that has been promised by God to the nation of Israel since the covenant with Abraham. That is what is being described here in the scripture, a place where peace and productivity are unhindered by the ways of man. However, like the other parts of Isaiah that we have looked at so far during Advent we need to know that in the previous chapter Isaiah once again describes God's judgement on the world for its transgressions against his Holy Word.

The world rejects God's ways over and over, and therefore they are destined to receive his judgement, a Holy God cannot do anything except righteously judge the ways of mankind. Society in general has always chosen to follow its own hearts desires over the ways of the Lord. However, for those who place their trust in the Lord, those who place their very life in His hands, in today's scripture they are getting another glimpse of what waits for them in eternity. A place of relief and restoration from their present trials and tribulations, and the eternal hope and joy of spending life eternal in the Kingdom of Heaven. This vision of Isaiah records some of the imagery of the beauty of God's earthly reign.

This served as a reminder for the people of Israel and for us, that God does things in his own way and according to his own timeline. When God deems it to be the correct time, he will establish His glorious kingdom on earth and defeat evil for all of His people. There will be a time that we will live with hearts full of Joy in the Lord, a time of peace, prosperity, and plenty.

### **Isaiah 35:1-2**

**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.**

In chapter 34 we are told that the nations shall be out in a gloomy wilderness, a dry desert that is full of predators. Then suddenly when God's kingdom is established the whole of the desert will come to life. Lands which had been dry, and barren will be filled with life, the crocus will bloom painting what was once a dull brown desert with the color of spring, like the very earth itself is shouting with joy at the coming of the Lord. Water will flow and the soil will be fertile, the predators will be withdrawn and the life of peace and plenty will be present in the land.

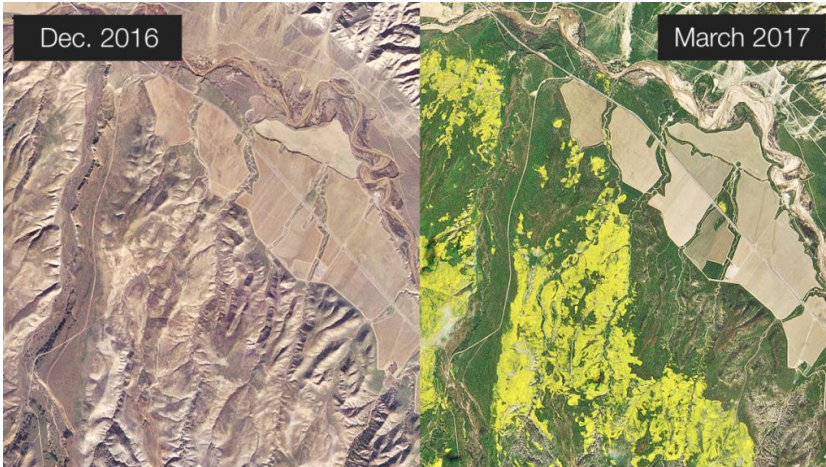
Why has this happened? It is simple God has come near and produced unimaginable joy. Humans think we have control over joy, we do have some control over our happiness, but joy only comes from God alone. Joy is produced in the world and in the human heart when it is in the presence of the One True living God.

Look at the people that surround you in the world. The people who constantly push God from their lives, that do not place their trust in the Lord, live a life that is often dry and lifeless like the desert, they may have times of happiness, but they turn to false idols and escapes like alcohol and drugs to get away from their stresses and troubles. Most of their life is a struggle to survive and fight off predators so that they can get ahead in the world, they cannot find joy in just being alive.

On the other hand, the people who have accepted God into their lives, who turn to him with their trials and tribulations and trust in him to carry out his will, they find joy in the simple things. They can look at a world filled with chaos and troubles and find peace because they know that the Lord is in control and his plan is being carried out. They live in the joy of his healing and transforming grace.

This is what the land is experiencing, a transformation that goes beyond rainfall in the promised land. Small flowers of all colors bursting forth from the desert turning it into a place of beauty. If you have never seen a picture of a super bloom in a desert it is a radical transformation that is beautiful beyond words.

This is a picture from space of the Carrizo badlands in California in dec of 2016 and march of 2017.



Here is what it looks like most of the time.



And here is the same place in super bloom.



How can you look at this kind of radical change in nature and still deny the majesty of God. People who say that God never shows himself are blinded by their own self focus, the very planet we live on rejoices in joy at the presence of God. Imagine if that kind of change can be made in the deserts of this world what God is capable of doing in the human heart.

**Isaiah 35:3-7**

**<sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.  
<sup>4</sup>Say to those who have an anxious heart,  
“Be strong; fear not!  
Behold, your God  
will come with vengeance,  
with the recompense of God.  
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 shall the lame man leap like a deer,  
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.  
For waters 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;  
in the haunt of jackals, where they lie down,  
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.**

Isaiah’s message to the people of God in the land of Judah is once again encouraging them to walk in the light of the Lord and live according to his Word. He tells them that they are to stand fast and encourage one another in troubled times. They are called to support those who are weary, exhausted, or depressed because of the events in their lives. They are called to be with their brothers and sisters who are fearful, terrified, and anxious about the evils of the world and the troubles in their lives. He instructs them that whatever is happening in the world they are to be there for one another, and rest assured that God in his divine plan will deliver them all into his eternal kingdom.

This is a strong message for people who are suffering under persecution. Standing firm in your faith against government authority can strike fear into even the most faithful. Fear that can cause them to stand by silently while the world falls further and further from God. Yet, Isaiah is saying that spending time in God’s Word can offer encouragement to even the most weary, feeble, and anxious of his faithful. God is greater than any nation, and group or any man. Isaiah reminds God’s people that no



one who stands against God will be allowed to continue their oppression and persecution when His kingdom comes. In his own perfect time, God will execute his will upon those who do not have faith and they will stand before him and face his judgement and their eternal punishment.

Advent reminds us of all of this. Remember Advent means “He Comes”. This is the promise that was delivered to the people of Judah, and this is the message that we celebrate every Advent season as we approach Christmas. God has promised his people that he hears their prayers, and in his time, he will answer them all, even if we never recognize that he has answered our prayer. And while we await his second coming, we can be assured that God comes to us every day we live. He comes to us through His Word, His acts of providence, through the influence of His Holy Spirit and he will be with his faithful every day until the day that we are united with him in life eternal in the Kingdom of heaven.

Then he promises life abundant for his people. The same way that the desert was radically changed by the life-giving waters of the Lord, the lives of the faithful shall be radically altered by the life-giving water of the Lord. He will heal the sick, the blind shall have sight, the deaf will hear, the lame will leap like the deer, and the mute will sing for Joy.

This is the promise of Salvation, we will be saved and granted access into the Holy Kingdom of God. A place where the land and the people are eternally changed by the presence of the One true living God.

This implies that we will have a full physical, social, and spiritual life. In Scripture the blind, the lame and the mute are often used to speak of both physical and spiritual ailments. The prophet Isaiah’s vision tells of a time when God’s people will be at their full potential, they will have full lives without any of the hindrances of this world. A time when God’s people will no longer have to trust in anything of this world, because their every need is met as they live in the presence of God.

Once again, we are told that the water will radically alter the land, there will be well watered pools everywhere. Water which is needed for grass, reeds, and papyrus all critical components of the lives of the people of Judah, all things that require more water than just a light rain. This is both a literal change in the world and a spiritual change in the people. Gods’ blessings will fall upon his people like the waters on the land, blessing them with his grace and his healing as well as what we celebrate at Advent, hope, peace, joy, and love while we live in his presence. With the Lord living in the presence of his people they will all be fulfilled and live righteously according to His will for all of eternity in His Kingdom.

**Isaiah 35:8-10**

**<sup>8</sup> And a highway shall be there,  
and it shall be called the Way of Holiness;  
the unclean shall not pass over it.  
It shall belong to those who walk on the way;  
even if they are fools, they shall not go astray.  
<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 gladness and joy,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.**

Finally, we reach the focus point of this piece of the vision, a highway upon which the Holy people of God walk, The Way of Holiness. A place where the unclean cannot walk. A place where those who place their trust in God cannot go astray.

Religious pilgrimages were commonplace at the time, people often walked on the roads and highways to Jerusalem to visit its temple. Yet this highway will be different it will lead to the city of God, a place where all of God's ways are followed. It will not be like the highways that led to Jerusalem, which were often dangerous to travel because of thieves and robbers. Instead, this will be a way that is perfectly safe, because the unclean and wicked will not be able to travel along it, no morally unjust person, no perverse people, no one who refuses to walk in the truth of the Lord will be able to set foot upon the Way of Holiness. It is set apart for only those who have received their Righteousness in Christ, because it is only the redeemed who are Holy.

The ones who walk upon the Way of Holiness will walk in genuine Christ likeness. It is not a road that is named after the path but instead after the people who walk upon it. The people walking on the path are Holy, set apart from this world by God grace and their faith.

You may ask yourself what right do you have to walk upon this Way of Holiness? Ask yourself, have you been redeemed from the ways of this world, from your sin by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ? If you have repented from your sin and placed your faith and trust fully in the Lord, then you have the right to walk in Christ's likeness here on earth and then to walk upon the Way of Holiness with Christ all the way to His eternal kingdom.

And in your walk upon the Way of Holiness you need not fear any troubles. There will be no lions, nor beasts upon the road. Not only will the wicked and unholy be kept off the road, even the wildness of nature will be prevented from hindering your walk to

God. The redeemed that walk upon the way of Holiness might walk through places of trouble on this earth, but their eternal life is secured in the Kingdom of God. The redeemed have all been brought out of captivity to this world and its ways, out of slavery to sin, by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. We know this is true when we look at our own lives, when we try to find our own way, we often feel insecurity because we trust in ourselves, but when we walk upon the way of holiness we can do so with confidence because when we follow God's ways we can come to no eternal harm.

Isaiah is describing a place with very limited access, a pathway where only God's redeemed can walk into his eternal kingdom after God has dealt with the oppressor. A highway upon which only those who have been judged and found faithful can walk in peace, filled with hope and joy as they move to the Kingdom of God.

This walk is started here on Earth, where we are taught to walk the Christian life, to walk in the Light of the Lord every day of our lives. To live in obedience of God's word and to love our God first with all of our heart, mind, body, and soul, and then to love our neighbors as ourselves, and even our enemies. This is a difficult walk here on earth, but Isaiah's vision points to a time when it will be a simple pilgrimage to the eternal Kingdom where we will walk alongside Jesus into the promised land. Yet even here and now while we walk in the light of Christ on earth, where we are hindered by beast and robbers, we have Christ who walks with us and protects us on the eternal walk with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

If we walk the way faithfully, we will arrive in Zion, the Holy city of God. A Place of worship to our King, Our Messiah. A place where the redeemed will be filled with gladness and joy which will drive away all worries and sadness for eternity. A place where God's people will be set free from their own sins and the sins of others. A place where God's people will be fully restored into the image of God, a full Christ likeness, a place where we will live at home with our Father for all of eternity. All of the struggles, challenges and troubles of this life will be gone, and we will have an eternity of everlasting joy.

Isaiah told the people of Judah, and all of us gathered here today, that the best is yet to come for the people of God. We may face times that are difficult here and now, but these times will not continue forever. Someday all of God's people will walk on His Highway, the Way of Holiness on their way to Zion to worship the Lord.

So, I pray that each of us walk in the way of the Lord here on earth now and that as we walk in Christ's Likeness that we can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in our life each and every day and be filled with the hope, peace, joy and love of the Lord that we enjoy during the season of Advent.

Let us pray,

### **May We Seek refuge in Your Word**

Lord God, heavenly Father,  
 you allowed your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 to become fully human  
 and come into the world to destroy the tyranny of the devil.  
 Deliver us poor offenders from sin and death  
 and give us eternal life.  
 Rule and govern our hearts by your Holy Spirit,  
 that we may seek no other refuge than his Word and avoid all offense,  
 that we may always be found among the faithful followers of your Son,  
 and by faith in him obtain eternal salvation,  
 through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,  
 who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
 one true God, now and forever. Amen.

*Source: Veit Dietrich*

### **Music Ministry: “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” by Trish Warren**

### **Invitation to Offering**

### **Offering**

Presenting our tithes and offerings is an act of worship. I want to encourage you to write a cheque and drop it in the mail to the church using your envelope, if you have one. (St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, PO Box 161, 1 Drummond St W, Perth, ON K7H 3E3). We also have another option for you for giving and that is you can make an e-Transfer. This note from our treasurer:

**E-transfers are now accepted. Please note the new email address for this purpose only. [standrewspert offering@gmail.com](mailto:standrewspert offering@gmail.com) If you have an Offering Envelope #, please include it in the message section of the INTERAC transfer page you fill in. If you wish any part of your donation to go to a specific fund (e.g., Presbyterian Sharing) please mention this in your message.**

### **Offertory Prayer** **(Congregant Prepared)**

### **Closing Hymn #139: “Hark! the Herald Angels Sing”**

Hark! the herald angels sing  
 glory to the newborn King,

peace on earth and mercy mild,  
 God and sinners re conciled.  
 Joyful, all ye nations, rise;  
 join the triumph of the skies;  
 with the angelic host proclaim,  
 'Christ is born in Bethlehem.'

Refrain:

Hark! the herald angels sing  
 glory to the newborn King.

Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
 Christ, the everlasting Lord,  
 late in time behold him come,  
 offspring of a virgin's womb.  
 Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!  
 Hail the incarnate deity!  
 Pleas'd on earth with us to dwell,  
 Jesus, our Emmanuel.

Hail the heavenborn Prince of Peace!  
 Hail the sun of righteous ness!  
 Light and life to all he brings,  
 risen with healing in his wings.  
 Mild, he lays his glory by,  
 born that we no more may die,  
 born to raise the lost of earth,  
 born to give us second birth.

### **Pastoral Prayer**

O King of nations,  
 your reign spreads through all the lands,  
 you defend the cause of the poor  
 and plead for the wretched of the earth.  
 Fashion us into an obedient people,  
 that we may spread the good news  
 of your reign of perfect peace and justice,  
 until all creation will finally rejoice in your perfect will,  
 until all bend the knee to the King of kings and Lord of lords,  
 in whose name we pray, even Jesus Christ, your Son and our Savior. Amen

**Benediction**

God the Father, who loved the world  
so much that he sent his only Son,  
give you grace to prepare for eternal life.  
God the Son, who comes to us as Redeemer and Judge,  
reveal to you the path from darkness to light.  
God the Holy Spirit, by whose working  
the virgin Mary conceived the Christ,  
help you bear the fruits of holiness. Amen.