

Sunday, December 14, 2025

## Advent 3A

Isaiah 35:1-10

*Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, amen.*

My friends,

Advent is a season of waiting.

But not the empty, anxious waiting of uncertainty.

Advent waiting is **joyful** waiting.

For we know that the Lord

*has come, does come, and will come again.*

That is why this Sunday is called **Gaudete—Rejoice!**

Yet Isaiah 35 meets us honestly:

God's people do not rejoice because life is easy.

They rejoice because God breaks into the desert of our weakness.

He comes with His redeeming strength.

Israel once lived in exile—a place of spiritual dryness, danger, and death.

And Isaiah dares to proclaim that

the wilderness will blossom,

the weak will be strengthened,

and the ransomed will return Home with singing.

In the Gospel Reading, John the Forerunner

is sitting in his own dark exile.

He's in Herod's prison.

John sends messengers to Jesus, asking, "*Are You the One?*"

And Jesus answers by pointing to Isaiah 35:

*the blind see, the lame walk,*

*the deaf hear,*

*and the poor have good news preached to them.*

The desert was blooming.

This desert-blooming promise is for God's people still today.  
 We too, know weakness, anxiety, and waiting.  
 But Isaiah lifts our eyes to the One who comes into our wilderness.  
 Jesus makes a way where there is no way.  
 Jesus leads His ransomed people home.  
 With that hope, we rejoice.  
 And with that joy, we wait.

### 1. Trapped

My friends,  
 Isaiah spoke joyful prophecy to a people in trouble.  
 They were exiled far from the land of promise.  
 And they had no way back.  
 They were captives.  
 They were trapped.

God's people lived in a land of sorrow and sighing.  
 They could not sing the joyful songs of Zion.  
 Instead,  
*"By the rivers of Babylon [they] sat and wept  
 when [they] remembered Zion.  
 There on the willows  
 [they] hung [their] harps."* (Psalm 137:1–2.)

They saw no way home.  
 The obstacles were insurmountable.  
 Like a vast, impassable desert.

Israel could not cross it.  
 They had no strength.  
 Isaiah describes them as weak and feeble.  
 Anxious and afraid.  
 Blind, deaf, lame, and mute.  
 Full of sorrow and sighing.

The desert would kill them.  
 There was no water.  
 No life.  
 No beauty.  
 They would perish on the way.

Danger filled the wilderness.  
 Jackals.  
 Lions.  
 Ravenous beasts.  
 Enemies who would devour them.

There was no safe road home.  
 No highway to Zion.  
 They were cut off from the place where God promised to be  
 merciful to them.  
 They were cut off from the altar.  
 Separated from the OT sacraments.  
 And they had no way back.

My friends,  
 Many people today stand in the same place.  
 Not in a physical Babylon, but in a spiritual exile.  
 Without Jesus, people live far from God.  
 They cannot cross the desert of sin and judgment.

Without Christ, no one can cross that desert.  
 As Scripture says,  
*“Whoever believes in Him is not condemned.  
 But whoever does not believe is condemned already.”*

No one is strong enough to overcome God’s condemnation.  
 We are too **weak** and feeble.  
 Lamé and helpless.  
 As Isaiah says elsewhere,  
*“All of us have become like one who is unclean,  
 and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags;  
 we all shrivel up like a leaf,  
 and like the wind our sins sweep us away.”* (Isaiah 64:6).

Left alone, people are spiritually **blind & deaf**.

Satan blinds the minds of unbelievers.

They cannot see Christ's light. (2 Corinthians 4:4)

Jesus said their hearts are calloused.

Their ears don't hear.

They close their eyes.

*"Otherwise they might see with their eyes,*

*hear with their ears,*

*understand with their hearts and turn,*

*and I would heal them."* (Matthew 13:15)

Left alone, people are spiritually **mute**.

*"No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."*

(1 Corinthians 12:3b)

And without Christ, people are defenceless.

Sin and temptation maul them like **ravenous beasts**.

They have no protection from the devil.

who *"prowls around like a roaring lion,*

*seeking someone to devour."* (1 Peter 5:8).

On their own, people are lost.

They have no **way**.

They are trapped.

## 2. Jesus Comes to Rescue

So, my friends,

Jesus comes to rescue.

We cannot reach God.

So God comes to us.

*"Fear not.*

*Behold, your God will come...*

*He will come and save you."*

Jesus breaks into the desert of our weakness.  
He comes with His redeeming strength.  
Jesus brings us into the land of promise.

By His cross and resurrection,  
Jesus makes a highway through the desert.  
The place of death bursts with life.  
Justification overcomes condemnation.  
*“The desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus.”*

Where we are weak, Jesus is strong.  
*“While we were still weak,  
at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”*  
By His death and resurrection,  
*“the blind receive their sight and the lame walk,  
lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear,  
and the dead are raised up,  
and the poor have good news preached to them.”* (Matthew 11:5.)

By Christ’s work,  
*“God has delivered us from the domain of darkness  
and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,  
in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”*

For out of the desert of the cross flow streams of water.  
There, Jesus cried, *“I thirst.”*  
Christ thirsted so we could drink.  
*“One of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear,  
and at once there came out blood and water.”*  
Jesus said,  
*“If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me,  
and let him who believes in Me drink.  
As the Scripture has said,  
‘Out of His heart will flow rivers of living water.’”* (John 7:37–38)

By the cross He defeats the ravenous beasts.

Psalm 22 says,

*“Strong bulls surround me...  
They open wide their mouths...  
like a ravening and roaring lion...  
Dogs encompass me...  
They have pierced my hands and feet.”*

Jesus faced the beasts of sin and Satan for us.

Scripture says,

*“He shared in our humanity  
so that by His death  
He might destroy him who holds the power of death—  
that is, the devil.”*

And Paul writes,

*“He disarmed the powers and authorities  
and made a public spectacle of them,  
triumphing over them by the cross.”*

By the cross, Jesus makes a way where there is no way.

The way to enter the Most Holy Place  
is by His blood,

*“by a new and living way opened for us through... His body...”*

Through Jesus, we come home.

Jesus says,

*“I am the way and the truth and the life.”*

Jesus is the Highway of Holiness.

On His road, no lion can harm you.

No beast can devour you.

You are ransomed and redeemed by Jesus.

### 3. Patient Waiting

My friends,

Isaiah says,

*“Strengthen the weak hands,  
and make firm the feeble knees.*

*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.”* (Isaiah 35:3–4)

The season of Advent reminds us

that Jesus has come, comes, and will come.

Likewise, Jesus has saved you,

Jesus is saving you,

and Jesus will save you.

We live in the time of both now and not yet.

We have begun crossing the desert by the way of the cross.

We experience now the water of the Word  
and the blossom of the Sacrament in the desert.

The desert has begun blooming.

But we haven’t seen the full flower.

The desert hasn’t completely become a garden pool  
with reeds and rushes.

And so, encouragement and patience are in order.

We have joy this Sunday.

But not because our lives are now easy.

Oh no!

We rejoice because God breaks into the desert of our weakness.

Jesus comes with His redeeming strength.

In the desert, joy blooms.

But the desert is still there.

And we are people of the cross.

We walk the way of the cross.

Therefore, we know the paradox of the cross.

Out of thirst—water comes.

Out of persecution—flows blessing.

Out of temptation—help comes.

*“For because [Jesus] Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted.”* (Hebrews 2:18)

Out of sin – grace abounds all the more.

Out of weakness comes strength.

Out of suffering and sorrow comes joy.

Out of death comes resurrection and life.

So James tells us in today’s Epistle:

*“Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord.*

*See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it,*

*until it receives the early and the late rains.”* (James 5:7)

When we are pushed into the dry ground, joy does not abandon us.

For we are patient in Christ, and we know the rain is coming.

We will rise as the fruit of Christ’s resurrection.

Again, James says,

*“As an example of suffering and patience, brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.”*

(James 5:10)

In our Gospel Reading,

we have the example of the greatest prophet.

John the Forerunner.

There he is, living in the days of the coming of the Lord.

And he is suffering in prison.

He struggles with doubts.

But he patiently brings them to Jesus.

And Jesus sends His Word to strengthen him.

Even the greatest have questioned and sought answers, just as John did.  
 So, if you find yourself wrestling with your faith,  
 know that you are not alone.  
 Don't hide your questions.  
 Ask them.  
 When we don't hide our questions and bring them to Jesus,  
 we grow stronger and more resolute in our faith.  
 Bring your doubts to Jesus, just as John did.  
 Jesus will send His Word to strengthen you.

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My friends,  
 John saw the desert begin to blossom.  
 And yet John must still wait with patience.  
 When the ransomed of the Lord return and come to Zion with  
 singing, John will be there.  
 With a new head on his new shoulders.  
 John waits with us for the resurrection.

And we wait patiently—even joyfully.  
 For we know the end of our story.  
*“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.”* (Isaiah 35:10)

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 And with that joy, we wait.

*The peace of God, which surpasses understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus  
 our Lord, amen.*