**“Then Shall … ”**

Isaiah 35:1-10

James 5:7-11

Matthew 11:2-15

Advent 3

“’Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.’ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy … and a highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Way of Holiness.”

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

“**Then shall**” wonderful things happen … and joy prevail among people. But **when** (Isaiah reminds us to ask) will that “**then**” be? He reminds of its promise … and we know of **it (Him)** **then coming** 750 years after that reminder. **It** and **He** (wonderful things and joy) is the work from the person of God and Mary’s Son. **Wonderful things and joy, “then”, returned to the earth in Jesus**. And **THAT,** **heard** **by our ears** and **received and** **settled into our hearts**, ought to allow any challenges here to be seen through **God’s** **Christmas gift of wonderful things and joy to us**. And **THAT, “then”**, would make the **Advent spirit** **of wonder and joy** **percolate and** **bubble all around, in and through us**.

A man **in prison (awaiting his death as witness to the message of that hope that he’d helped share)** **himself-also** **needed and wanted THAT Good News of the “then” preached to him**. John wanted to know **that “then” was** (for Him and the whole world) **now**. Was **Jesus** the “**One who is to come” (he asked to be told)**, or **“shall we look for another?**” The **Him** **promised** was to **come and make** **things wonderful and joyful**. And without **HIM** (the Christ) **nothing could be**.

**Text**

John had earlier said: “Behold, the **Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world**” but wanted to **ask for himself … to himself be reminded** because of a **world** (and **perspectives**, and **awareness, … and even his**) **grossly** **out of sorts**. For John, he’d certainly **had** a sustaining faith in the hope of the Gospel Isaiah presented and, by the Holy Spirit, **knew his role in it**, and that this wonder and joy was **at hand in Jesus**. As the **precursor** (the one who “prepared the way”) he **knew** **Him (the “Way”) in person** because the Spirit had told him, aside from all the evidence. But even John **craved and needed (wanted) the Good News of its** **confirmation, because he, too, was flawed as a piece of a tragically fallen world**. **Reports** were filtering in **about** the **evidences** **of the Christ in Jesus (His “deeds”)**, but still he begged: “**please, please, please, please, please, bring the Good News of all the wonderful things that He was doing in fulfilling Isaiah’s prophesy**”.

**We** (after everything) shouldn’t be **that desperate, but maybe differently so**. We’re **past** all the proofs and should be well onto the pleasures by now. Yet that’s not complete and the waiting still goes on … our patience is tasked, so “hearing”, then, is **ours to need and want (to cherish and hold onto) as well**, and sometimes prison cells and death watches can feel like **what we’re in sometimes**. It’s understandable to crave hearing more **confirmations** …

… which **God’s Word and our rhythms in it provide**. Christmas follows Advent and every year **does** as it **did** after 4,000 years of the **promise of it**. Believers “**then**” **clung to that promise** through Isaiah that there’d **come a time** “**when**” the “eyes of the blind **shall** be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped, then **shall** the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.” This was a “**shall**”, not a “**might**” (all those **wonderful things**), yet **they had to wait** where **we don’t**. But “**then**” Jesus sent word to John: “tell him **WHAT YOU HEAR AND SEE OF ME**” (saying it for us and the whole world to **hear** as much as **John**): 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**. And **BLESSED IS** **the one who is not offended by Me**.” **John** was **not “offended by Jesus” unto death** even by the sword. **We and all people are offered to not be “offended by Jesus” unto death in our time and situations**. ….

Of all the **poetry** Isaiah used to call people to hope 750 years before Christmas, **LITERAL** those words were ultimately proven to be. Even **nature** (corrupted by **predatory** animals and **deserts** where rich plushness should have been) all changed back toward Eden’s direction. Without Jesus, Winters wouldn’t turn to Spring after their course and nothing could protect us from winds and hurricanes and absolute anarchy. **Civility** and **salvation from chaos** the entire world **has** because of Jesus’ coming and work. The lapping gently of a wave onto gulf sands rather than a psunami is **because** **Christ came bringing the wonderful things and joy of (among so many other things) a (for the most part) taming of the seas**. Christmas (with the God’s Son’s walking upon our soil to heal, dying and rising to change everything) **THAT** was for the **wonder and joy of the cosmos**.

**Application**

As hard as it may be to think of it as anything other than **fear** in John’s desire to hear the message of Jesus (and that also among believers at the time of Isaiah awaiting a imminent-seemingly defeat by enemy armies), I think each was just a **desire for greater joy and wonder. I think** we underestimate John’s confident saving faith in the Christ who had come even though in prison waiting to die. **I think** we underestimate believers’ confident saving faith in the protection will of God even with armies knocking on all their doors. **I think** we underestimate ourselves and our brothers and sisters as we all deal with challenges. **I think** in **all cases among believers**, **fear** is not really the problem; just a **DESIRE (a WANT, NEED and CRAVING) FOR GREATER JOY and WONDER, so to “hear about the deeds of the Christ, and be confirmed in our saving faith**.

**Advent**, with the absolute promised certainty of Christmas coming after it (assuming Jesus doesn’t return in full glory before it, as is also promised for **any time now**) expands and grows our joy and wonder. Isaiah’s chapter 34 (coming immediately before that messianic promise of chapter 35) is one **of** death and destruction, the reality of swords and judgment, falling and not ever being able to get up again. But **35** promised (even while that’s around) **what Christmas delivered:** **JOY AND WONDERFUL THINGS RETURNED TO EARTH WITH JESUS CHRIST**. ….

You and I will have struggles that may **seem** (at the time) like imprisonments or death waits for your own death or others. Army’s might **seem** (for a while) amassed at the gate, and we may **worry** (about some things in some ways). But **we will (I think)** not **really** **fear**, just **long for greater wonder and joy**. And “**then**” we will be **wanting to hear about what Jesus did and that the promises of what He yet plans to do**. And we’ll **enjoy** the fact of His birth and manger, life and (on earth) healing walk and “**then**” **death for us** and **resurrection** … **all** so that we too can be resurrected to life, even now.

The secular try to fill the season and year with **busyness**, and (for some moments) sentiments whipped up (a little) by tinsel and lighting and movies and music, parties and a faster-paced-bustle than normal; and we believers will have fun with some of those things too. But, mostly, we will **REJOICE** in the One this season remembers as coming to change darkness or even seeming grayness to light, give life to where there was death and no hope, confidence in places where (without Him) that would be naïve, and **WONDER** where there couldn’t be any **without** the Christmas gift of Jesus. **Joy IS to the World, the Lord IS Come**. In +His name. Amen.