



## “Wait in Wonder...No Fear”

### Third Sunday Of Advent

Saturday & Sunday, December 14 & 15, 2019  
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Isaiah 35:1-10; Psalm 146:5-10;  
 James 5:7-10; Matthew 11:2-11

It's the most wonderful time of the year. With the kids jingle belling. And everyone telling you be of good cheer. It's the most wonderful time of the year. It's the hap-happiest season of all. With those holiday greetings and gay happy meetings. When friends come to call. It's the hap-happiest season of all.

But what if it isn't? What if we don't feel happy? What if right now this doesn't feel like the most wonderful time of the year? Where does that leave us?

Because even in this time of “happiness” there is still sadness, pain, suffering and scariness happening around us and to us. Listening to Andy Williams or Bing Crosby or Burl Ives tell me to be happy in this season sometimes isn't enough because we live in a scary world. Yes, it is Advent and Christmas is coming, but that doesn't mean all the scary, awful stuff melts away. Sure, Advent is a time of preparation, but it is also a time of mournful longing, longing for God to act when we are afraid.

Because even in Advent, I hold my keys tightly in my hand and walk quickly from my parked car to my apartment at night. I check, double check, and triple check to make sure the door is locked before I go to bed. As a woman, sexual assault is a fear I live with every day of my life.

Any time I go to a concert or any place with lots of crowds, I can't help but feel a little fear of someone with sinister motives and a gun. Even seven years later, our country is still reeling after the December shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School where little kids were gunned down. They were holy innocents of sorts and this is still a fear every parent and child in the United States carries with them to school every morning. This fear is exemplified in the rising profits of companies that sell bulletproof backpacks.

Or think about climate change. The earth continues to get warmer. Wildfires blaze. Hurricanes get stronger. Our home is headed toward catastrophic doom. According to the American Psychological Association, “eco-anxiety” is a real thing. People have chronic fear of the effects of climate change.

And like any person, I worry about my family. I fear for their safety and their health. For real, we live in a fear-filled world. And so, did the people who heard our reading from Isaiah thousands and thousands of years ago.

The story of Isaiah comes from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE in a time when empires in the Near East were rising and falling. Most scholars believe the prophet Isaiah lived in Judah, in the southern kingdom where Jerusalem was situated. This small kingdom was surrounded by large, powerful empires threatening to attack and destroy Judah and its people.

In the chapters leading up to what we just heard in chapter 35, there was a lot of destruction, suffering, and death. Isaiah was speaking to a people in despair, to a people who were afraid, to a people who probably wondering where God was in the midst of this destruction. Isaiah was speaking to a people feeling alone in their big, scary world. They were in mournful longing, longing for God to act on their behalf when they were afraid.

And through the words of Isaiah, God was promising something to those people. God was promising a world changed. You see God is in the business of flip-flopping. God loves to turn everything upside down. Things don't ever stay the same in the eyes of God. Through the words of Isaiah, God was flipping their world around. God was transforming everything that was scary and awful about their world into something new.

The desert wouldn't be a desert anymore. The desert would be streams of water flowing there. There would be a place where life grows abundantly, a place where flowers grow in bright colors in the sunshine. That's hard for us to imagine in this season of winter but think of that super bloom in the deserts of California earlier this year when seeds that were dormant in the desert popped up to fill a dry, dead place with life. In this kind of dramatic transformation, God's people will see the glory of God!

And God promises the same for us. We hear these words from Isaiah to point us back to God's old promises, but also to point us forward to a future transformed. Just as God's people then needed words of transformation, we too need these words. Because God is in the business of flip-flopping, we know that God will transform our big, scary world into something new. God is working to transform our fear and sorrow into assurance and joy.

Now joy is different from the hap-happiness that Andy Williams sings about. The joy that God promises us is everlasting according to Isaiah. I read recently, "Joy is different from its cousin, happiness. Happiness is temporary, fleeting...But joy is permanent. Joy is what happens when you've wept and despaired and thought it was all over," writes Sarah Carson. Joy comes from God and joy is God because they are both everlasting.

For those who heard Isaiah's words, joy was a world of abundant life. Joy was hands made strong and knees made firm. Joy was being led by God on a highway home. For us, joy might be all those things.

But in this season of Advent, our joy comes from God in the form of baby born to poor parents in the city of Bethlehem. We have joy because we know God has already transformed our world once by being born in human flesh. And God will transform our world and us again. Because remember, God is in the business of flip-flopping; God will turn everything upside down for the better. So, thanks be to God for turning our fear into everlasting joy! Amen.

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