

*May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable
in Your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

Rejoice, people of God! And again I say, REJOICE!

On this snowy morning, Scripture calls us to sing out our joy:

our Savior approaches!

The Lord is coming with power and great might

to redeem, to heal, and to save!

Into this world, wild and beautiful and broken,

into communities longing for peace,

into every heart crying out for healing,

into all this, our Savior comes!

Now, we are not always able to see our Lord radiant in glory.

We may glimpse him at the Eucharist,

or feel his loving attention when we pray.

But so often, we can barely see beyond our own anxiety.

Or we forget to look for God, distracted for days or weeks or months

by the lures and lies that flood social media.

Sometimes we behold the agony of the world,

and even with our theology of the Incarnation,

knowing Christ was born into a world wracked by the violence of empire,

born because God loves this world,

even knowing Christ promises to be with us always, to the end of the age,^{Matt 28:20}
we don't know how to see the light of Christ in our present moment.

So, on this snowy morning, nature can teach us.

We know the sun is there regardless of our local weather, right?

Even when sunlight is veiled by snow or rainclouds,

we know the sun is there.

So too our merciful Redeemer, the Sun of Righteousness, is present,

shining the light of grace,

nurturing all of life as it unfolds,

even when our vision is occluded and we cannot see him.

“Here is your God!” Isaiah sings. “Here is your God!”

If that is sometimes hard to believe, well, the prophet knew that as well as we do.

Isaiah prophesied at a time when the Assyrian empire was destroying cities and enslaving populations from one end of the ancient Near East to the other. The Assyrian juggernaut seemed unstoppable—and the Assyrians were notoriously cruel to prisoners of war, torturing and mutilating those under their sway. It was a horrifying state of affairs. And tiny countries like Israel and Judah didn't stand a chance. In 701 B.C., the Assyrian army marched on Jerusalem, deploying troops around the city to besiege it. Isaiah's people were terrified.

That time, there was good news for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The Assyrians turned back from besieging the city, and eventually Assyria fell, as all earthly empires fall. But when one empire falls, another rises to take its place. Generations later, scribes who had preserved Isaiah's prophecies witnessed the rise of Babylonia, another great power that threatened to colonize the entire ancient Near East. The Babylonians attacked Judah, and that time—in 587 B.C.—Jerusalem fell to the invaders. Unthinkable trauma! Judeans were carried off into exile in Babylon.

Our lesson this morning speaks a word of promise, a word of incandescent hope that bridges this history of trauma and the unfolding of God's salvation.¹

Isaiah honors the suffering of his people, yes. That suffering is real.

But he also calls them to meet their Savior—

the God who has never forgotten them,

the One who is with them even in times of trauma and despair,

the One who calls them out of exile toward healing and hope!

Isaiah urges his people to find the road home, to walk the “highway” of holiness, journeying out of darkness toward the place where they belong. Not “home” in any simple sense. Their actual homes might have been destroyed long ago. But the prophet knows “home” is wherever we meet the One who made us, the One who calls us into the light of divine Love. Isaiah gives us a God who promises, “I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit.

^{57:15} Home is wherever we seek God. Because God is there.

What about today? The troubles of our present time are profoundly challenging. We see corruption on a multinational scale, wars too many to count, disastrous exploitation of the environment, global networks for human trafficking, the resurgence of fascism, and gun violence that leaves a landscape littered in bodies. Two were killed at Brown University yesterday; 11 were killed in Sydney, Australia just a few hours ago, at a Hanukkah celebration.² Yet the prophet sings, “Here is your God!” Was Isaiah just naïve? Let’s consider what Isaiah could see already in his own time.

Isaiah sees an earth parched and desolate, polluted by violence and corruption, where lament rises from all who hunger and thirst^{24:4-12} (that’s Isaiah 24). Isaiah sees pervasive greed and unjust dealings,^{26:10} with flawed leaders failing their people and rendering false judgments.^{28:7} Isaiah sees villainous elites ruining “the poor with lying words” and ignoring “the plea of the needy”^{32:6-7} (Isaiah 26, 28, and 32). Isaiah sees it all: shame, disgrace, treachery, and—this is Isaiah 33—broken treaties that cause the entire earth to languish!^{33:8-9}

Isaiah was not naïve. Not at all. He was resolute in faith. Resolute in faith!

Isaiah offers a word of promise for his moment and ours,

in full view of violence and corruption, greed and brutality toward the poor.

As the earth convulses and the vulnerable cry out,

Isaiah sings a holy promise like a star in the night sky,

cutting through the shadows of sin and greed,
blazing into the tumult of our grief and struggle,
illuminating dark places of exile, fear, and hopelessness.

Now, in the present moment of his people's trauma.

When the threat is highest and hope seems impossible. That's when Isaiah sings
this oracle of joy to his vulnerable, terrified community.

“Rejoice!” Isaiah cries out. “Rejoice!”

Speaking not from naïveté, but from spiritual resolve.

Because joy builds resilience. Joy fosters creativity and fresh vision.

And whenever a corrupt leader or a malevolent group would prefer the people
stay weak, silent, and despairing, joy counts as resistance!

You know Mary's Song, the Magnificat, is a song of resistance, right?

What the choir just recited so eloquently is 100% a resistance song that celebrates
God's power to bring down the arrogant and lift up the lowly.

Regime change: God's power for justice is invincible!

So, too, our stunning oracle today in Isaiah 35 is a resistance song.

Our rejoicing in God's power, singing the mighty advance of a just and merciful
God, puts the corrupt empires of this world on notice: they will crumble to dust!

So sing out your joy, people of God!

Even when it seems we're lost in a trackless wilderness—rejoice!

Because there is a path forward.

That's the promise of Isaiah and every prophet who ever glimpsed the
 shining light of God through dark clouds of violence and despair.

There is a path for you—for us—toward home.

To find it, all you have to do is listen:

Listen for the joy folks sing when they know God is mighty to save!

Listen for those who praise God even in a barren landscape,
 when it seems like nothing can grow and threat is all around.

Listen for voices singing,

“In the wilderness, make straight the way of the LORD!” Isa 40:3 → Matt 3:1–3

and, “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice!” Phil 4:4

Listen for rejoicing, and you'll find the path home.

It's a lifelong journey—you know that—finding your way toward God,
 who is our true Home.

But as you journey on, you'll see transformation unfolding all around you:

You'll see:

“The desert shall rejoice and blossom!

Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert!

The burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.”

That's a promise from the One who calls us and leads us home:

Jesus Christ, to whom be all honor, glory, and praise, now and forever. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Carolyn J. Sharp

14 December 2025

Advent 3A, Gaudete Sunday

Isaiah 35:1–10; Canticle 15 [the Magnificat]; James 5:7–10; Matthew 11:2–11

Preached at St. Thomas’s Episcopal Church, New Haven, Connecticut

Gaudete, gaudete!

Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine.

Gaudete!

Biblical passages where the Vulgate translation uses *gaudete* include these:

Isa 52:9 “*Break forth together into singing, you ruins of Jerusalem; for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem.*”

Isa 66:10 “*Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice with her in joy, all you who mourn over her.*”

Matt 5:12 “*Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*”

Luke 6:23 “*Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets.*”

Luke 10:20 “*Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*”

See also 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:18; 3:1; 4:4; 1 Thess 5:16; and 1 Pet 4:13.

¹ In the literarily and theologically complex book of Isaiah, many scholars see chapters 34 and 35 as a structurally crucial bridge between the oracles of First Isaiah (Isaiah of Jerusalem, prophesying in the Neo-Assyrian period, eighth century BCE) and the later material known as Deutero-Isaiah, which comes from the Persian period (sixth century BCE or later). See Ulrich Berges, “Isaiah: Structure, Themes, and Contested Issues,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets*, ed. Carolyn J. Sharp (Oxford University Press, 2016), 153–170, esp. 156–157. Berges writes of

the architecture of the book, “The book of Isaiah can be regarded as a literary cathedral in which the reader is invited to witness Zion’s past history and future destiny” (157).

² On December 13, two were killed and nine were injured at Brown University. The Brown University shooter also shot an M.I.T. professor on December 15; the victim died on December 16. The final death toll in the December 14 mass shooting in Sydney has risen to 15 victims.