

Brief Meditation for December 12, 21010

LECTIONARY TEXT FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY IN ADVENT

- ¹ The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom like the crocus; ²it 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.
- ³ Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.
⁴Say 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."
- ⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶ 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;
⁷ 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.
- ⁸ 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.
- ⁹No 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.
- ¹⁰ 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.**

ˆMeditation on Isaiah 35:10

THERE WILL BE SINGING

Most of us love Christmas music. Of course, not all of us are musicians. A man and his wife were browsing in a crafts store one day when the man noticed a display of country-style musical instruments. He looked at the flutes, the dulcimers, and the recorders. Then he picked up a shiny, one-stringed instrument and twanged out a few notes. The other shoppers were amused. His wife slipped up and whispered in his ear, "I hate to tell you this, honey, but you're trying to play a cheese slicer."

No, we're not all musicians. One woman told a story about her recently-retired parents. Her mom had always wanted to play the piano, so her dad bought her a piano for her birthday. A few weeks later the woman asked how her mom was doing. "Well," said her dad, "We returned the piano. I persuaded her to switch to a clarinet instead." "How come?" his daughter asked. "Well," he answered, "because with a clarinet, she can't sing when she plays."

No, we're not all great singers, either. Have you heard the story of the Christmas Eve service where the choir director had gone to a lot of trouble to prepare an excellent soprano soloist for her part? As her beautiful voice soared over the congregation, she was suddenly joined by a "street person" sitting near the choir. The newcomer's voice had seen better days. It quavered along, slightly off-key. The choir members kept looking frantically at the director to see what he would do, but he did not interrupt. Afterwards some of the choir members asked the director why he hadn't stopped the intruder. "Because," he replied, "I wasn't sure which song God would like better."

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Music is an important part of Christmas. And that's not only for sentimental reasons. God loves music. How do I know? Because there is so much music in heaven! Choirs of saints and angels sing all the way through the Book of Revelation. And the Book of Isaiah has plenty of songs in it, too.

This is one of my favorite passages in the Bible. *"The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. It will burst into bloom like the crocus. It will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God... Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame man leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert..."*

Then we see the procession of the children of God marching into the New Jerusalem. And they will come singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Being part of that cantata will make every tear and sorrow we experienced in the old world flee away forever.

Now I have to get down and dirty with you. The Gospel of Luke doesn't tell us that the angels in the sky above the shepherds were actually singing. It only says that they were saying "Glory to God in the highest!" But how could angels not sing with this news? I suspect that angelic speech sounds like music to us when they're speaking all together.

I love the quote by Victor Hugo: "Music attempts to express what cannot be said about something which it is impossible to remain silent."

The great Baptist preacher, Charles Spurgeon, once said, "I used to know an old Methodist; and the first thing in the morning, when he got up, he began singing. I have seen him in his little workshop, with his lapstone on his knee, and he was always singing, and beating with his hammer.¹ When I said to him once, "Why do you always sing, dear brother?" he replied, "Because I always have something to sing about."

If ever we had something to sing about, it is the Christmas Gospel. God came to us in our sinful condition. He did not turn away from us or destroy us, as we surely deserved. But He came. And it wasn't just a temporary visit. The Second Person of the Trinity, God the Son, took on our humanity in the person of Jesus. And He took it on forever. Jesus, the God-Man will sit at the Father's right hand for all eternity, with his saved children gathered in glory in God's new heaven and earth. How could we not sing that story?

Rich Mullins was a beloved artist and singer who was killed in a tragic accident in 1997. Among many others, he wrote, "Our God is a Mighty God." Eric Hauck, a close friend of Rich's, recalls being with him in a worship service just a few days before he died. The music sounded awful. Even the leaders were singing out of tune. Rich later went up to the microphone and said, "I love to be in church, I love to listen to people sing and play from their heart. In my profession we worry about being in tune and sounding good, but this music tonight is the most pleasing to God, because it is so real, and it comes from the hearts of the children of God." That was the last time Eric ever saw Rich Mullins cry.

Yes, sometimes the songs about Jesus make us cry, with tears of joy. Have a merry and teary Christmas!

¹ I tried to Google "lapstone." There are hundreds of places and organizations with that name, but I didn't find a definition.