

Message for Sunday, December 14, 2025

Scripture: Isaiah 35: 1-10

Title: Fear of Joy

## **Welcome**

## **Announcements**

Giving Options; Special Offering is Scholarship; Blue Christmas Service today at 4:30PM; Advent study today at 2PM Verde Hall; United Women of Faith Christmas Fellowship-Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup> at 11:30AM; Toys due for Sonoyta by Tuesday, December 16<sup>th</sup>.

Last call on supplies for School Christmas Party; Giving tree is for food pantry. Gifts for staff basket in the foyer. Cookies, cookies, cookies...Christmas Eve offering designated for Meals on Wheels.

## **Advent Candle Readings (Ken and Naoma Tyner)**

Reader 2

We have lit again the first two candles in our Advent wreath, to remind us of God's gifts of hope and peace. Today we will light the third candle, the candle of Joy.

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Reader 1

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As we wait for Christmas, the birth of Jesus, we look forward to the joyful celebrations we will share and those we love.

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The prophet Zephaniah calls us to shout for joy, because God will transform the people. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the angel told the shepherds not to be afraid.

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The angels brought "Good News of Great Joy which will be to all people." The good news of Jesus' birth and the promise of Shalom are still "tidings of great joy" for us today.

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Reader 2

Paul tells us to rejoice in God always. The third candle reminds us of our joy in Jesus Christ. (light the 3rd candle)

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**All-Please Say in Unison**

**God of Joy, thank you for the excitement and delight we experience at**

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**this joyful time of year. Help us to share your joy with others, so that they too, will be filled with your spirit. Amen.**

**O Come O Come Emmanuel**

**Song**

**Call to Worship**

L: We gather today in great hope, longing to see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God.

**P: The Almighty has done great things for us, Holy is God's name.**

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L: May our worship strengthen our hands, make firm our trembling knees, and unburden our fearful hearts.

**P: The Almighty has done great things for us, Holy is God's name.**

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L: Knowing that God is near, let us be patient with the times and wait one another.

**P: The Almighty has done great things for us, Holy is God's name.**

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L: To all who ask about our hope, let us tell the good news of what we have seen and heard.

**P: The Almighty has done great things for us, Holy is God's name.**

**Unison Prayer**

**Joyful and patient God, you break into our Advent busyness with your extravagant promise of glory and joy.**

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**Fire up our imaginations with holy trust in your goodness. Inspire us with a patience that sees beyond our habitual longing for past glories and understandings.**

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**Move us beyond our too familiar criticisms of one another and ourselves.**

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**Open our eyes and help us to see your compassion, already at work in our world: healing, restoring, strengthening, and telling the good news that you are near.**

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**Make us signs of your everlasting joy for your people and for all the world We pray in the name of Jesus, whose nearness we proclaim. Amen.**

L: As we come to this time of offering, let us remember that giving is an opportunity for us to respond to God's generosity with our own.

**Offering/Song**

**Scripture: Isaiah 35:1-10 NRSVue**

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus

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it shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and shouting. 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.]]

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Strengthen the weak hands and make firm the feeble knees.

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Say to those who are of a fearful heart, "Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you."

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Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be opened;

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then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert;

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the burning sand shall become a pool and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp; the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

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A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God's people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

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No 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.

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And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

### **Message: Fear of Joy**

Years ago, I went on a trip for the first time, in a long time, by myself. Katie and I had been married for a few years, and Olivia was about 6 months old. I had to go overseas on a seminary trip to Turkey for 2 weeks and Lebanon for 1 week. I actually wasn't alone on this trip, I had a roommate, but it was the first time in a very long time that I had gone away with people who didn't actually live with me.

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Before I went on that trip I was fearful. I was scared of a whole slew of potential issues. Like others that have hearing loss, I was worried about rooming with someone who had never stayed the night with a deaf person. Would they be understanding? Would they be patient? Would I wake up to my alarms, this is a fear I still have today since I sometimes just cannot hear my alarm. What if my hearing aids broke? What if something happens to the plane? (I had never flown that far before.) I was traveling too two predominantly Muslim countries not to long after 9/11. Were we going to be safe? What if something happened at home? Katie was all on her own with our 6-month-old. My list of fears went on and on and grew exponentially.

To not leave you hanging I did go on the trip. I did wake up to every alarm. My roommate and I did have a falling out about 2 and ½ weeks into the trip over his drinking. My hearing aids never broke down. Everyone we met in both countries were kind and helped us understand them and their culture. Back at home, my neighbors were robbed at gun point early one morning when Katie was leaving the house, but nothing happened to her.

The things I was fearful of didn't happen, or happened in ways I didn't expect. Things I didn't expect happened. But in the end everything turned out okay. In fact, there are many great memories I carry from that trip/time.



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I struggled this week with what the opposite emotion of Joy was. For most of us, when we are growing up learn that sadness is the opposite of joy, but I don't think that's the case. Instead, it is fear that can lock us into not experiencing what God is calling us towards. Our passage today is a reflection of 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah. The book of Isaiah is written by at least three people. This section comes from an author who was living in the exile, while the other two passages we have read this advent season came from first Isaiah, who lived in Judah warning of their impending doom.

Isaiah is dreaming, imagining, looking toward the future to see what the people of Israel will experience when they return to the promise land. The vision that Isaiah has is one of joyful celebration as the perceived wrongs are turned right, and things are made complete. Now I intentionally used the term complete in this sense because of what the passage talks about. You see I suspect if we unpack each thing that Isaiah is talking about we will see where people are fearful of not being accepted into community. A great example of this is the disabilities example in this passage.

This passage speaks of broad healing of people with disabilities. Why is a disabling condition fearful? It's because it means exclusion from the community. Exclusion from being a part of things.

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Today's society benefits from you and I being fearful. You need to fear the person who will take your job. You need to fear the person who might be scamming social security, Medicare, or food stamps. You need to fear the Republicans-they are going to destroy us all. You need to fear the Democrats because they are going to bankrupt the country and force you to believe things you don't want to believe. You need to be fearful of that person walking down the street, that's why you need a gun. You need to be fearful that your kids don't have enough to survive on without you, so you need to buy more life insurance. You need to be fearful of not looking right, you have to dress the right way, wear makeup the right way, style yourself the right way.

We have solutions for all these fears. Keep the people out of the country you don't want. Kick freeloaders off assistance programs if we can determine who those people are. Vote for the democrats, or vote for the republicans. Buy a gun. Buy life insurance. Buy the right clothes, buy your children's love. Our society thrives on your fears, but Isaiah dares to dream. What would it look like if as it says in verse 8 "even a fool can't go astray"?

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Isaiah envisions a place where everything is corrected to completeness, and what he culturally deems completeness. He invites us to live in the joy that should so permeate the people of God that even a fool can't fall off this road. You see, even there, I think that holds a mirror to our culture. When was the last time that someone...even I... told you that following God can be so joyful that an idiot can do it? We again have predicated our faith on not doing the wrong thing, of making sure we are on the straight and narrow, but here in Isaiah we find that isn't the point. God makes the way, God makes it joyful for us, God offers us redemption and a path that is open for all.

Friends my prayer is for you to feel joy on this day and every day. I know it isn't possible. I know that we are surrounded by fear, but I invite you into this journey to Christmas day. A path so wide that everyone can do it. Amen.

**The Lord's Prayer/Pastoral Prayer**

**Song**

**Benediction**

**Song**