

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

LECTIONARY #7

READING I Isaiah 35.1-6a, 10

A reading from the book of the Prophet Isaiah.

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

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

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."

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

then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.

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.

Isaiah = I-ZAY-uh

The tone of this reading is set by the early repetitions of "rejoice" and "blossom."

Lebanon = LEB-uh-nuhn

Carmel = KAHR-m*l

Sharon = SHAYR-uhn

Note the shift into imperatives: "strengthen," "make," and "say."

Slight pause between "mute" and "sing."

READING I

The thirty-fifth chapter of the Book of Isaiah serves as something of a bridge between First and Second Isaiah. (Scholars typically divide the Book of Isaiah into three main parts, First, Second, and Third Isaiah.) While it continues much of the deliverance material found in the first part of Isaiah, the chapter introduces a theme that will be significant throughout Second Isaiah, namely, the people's journey home after exile. What is portrayed here is a world transformed. Isaiah's prophecy presents a series of grand reversals, images that demonstrate God's

power to rejuvenate and fully restore his deflated people.

The desert, through which the people sojourn on their way back to Judea, has been made abundantly beautiful with foliage and the joyful song of the pilgrims. As the Israelites take possession of the land once again, the cities of Lebanon, Carmel, and Sharon radiate God's glory.

Such images of renewal will certainly make strong hands that are weak and hearts that are frightened. Isaiah continues by making clear that God is not blessing his people from a distance. Just as he guided

his people through the desert after ratifying the covenant with Moses on Mount Sinai, so now God comes into their midst to save them. At his coming, blind eyes will see, deaf ears will hear, the lame will leap, and all those who return to Jerusalem will sing a song that will serve to overturn "sorrow and sighing" with "joy and gladness." Isaiah beautifully portrays the redeemed people successfully entering the gates of Jerusalem.