

■ The 115th Sharing of the Word

● First Reading: Isaiah 35:1-6, 10

This passage is a prophecy of hope restoration and salvation that follows the preceding chapter's proclamation of judgment upon a people who rebelled against God.

The wilderness and the dry land symbolize the devastation of Israel brought about by the absence of God. When God's salvation comes, the land is revived, and places of sorrow are transformed into joy, "bursting into bloom."

The strength, beauty, and abundance symbolized by the cedars of Lebanon represent "the glory of Lebanon," while Carmel (the mountain region) and Sharon (the plain), known as fertile and prosperous lands, symbolize the blessings bestowed by God.

Because God Himself intervenes to reveal the salvation of His people, the passage speaks of "the glory of the Lord and the splendor of our God." Following this, those who are sunk in despair and fear are encouraged with the words, "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees," which means, "Take courage, for the Lord is coming." Here, God's "salvation" has a twofold meaning:

liberation from the Babylonian Exile and foreign domination, and

salvation from sin, which would later be fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

As prophetic words of God's glory, "the eyes of the blind shall be opened" (Matthew 9:27-30) and "the ears of the deaf unstopped" (Mark 7:31-37); these are realized through the miracles of Jesus.

The reason the vestments of the Third Sunday of Advent are rose-colored is that they symbolize the transition from sorrow to joy.

To redeem means to pay a price to free someone from slavery. God redeems the people of Israel, who became captives because of sin, and restores them as His people once more. Their return from the Babylonian Exile and the restoration of fellowship with God are expressed as a "return to Zion (the Temple in Jerusalem)," a phrase that also symbolizes a "spiritual return" that leads to eternal life and salvation into the Kingdom of God.

● Second Reading: James 5:7-10

In the first half of his letter, James teaches that faith must be expressed through action, and that words and deeds must be consistent. In this passage, he instructs believers about trials, patience, and action in the life of faith.

Firmly believing that God's justice will surely be realized at the Second Coming, believers are called to remain steadfast in faith without being shaken by present suffering or injustice, and to "be patient until the coming of the Lord."

James compares this process, which requires patience, to a farmer who waits for the autumn rains (around October) and the spring rains (around March). In the same way, believers know that trials are temporary, and by quietly awaiting the Lord's return, they will receive the "precious harvest" of salvation and reward.

Patience means actively waiting for God's time with faith and hope. It involves maintaining an unshakable, inward faith, continuing to trust that God's hand is at work even when unseen, believing firmly that God's salvation is present in every hardship, and "strengthening one's heart."

As the Second Coming draws near, trials increase. Therefore, believers are exhorted to remain hopeful, encourage one another, and avoid complaints and disputes.

The command not to complain appears first among the reasons for avoiding judgment, because complaints reveal dissatisfaction with God and immaturity of faith. Words shape life (John 1:1-4) and have a powerful influence.

Since God is "standing at the door," the boundary of the household, He is in a position to carry out justice immediately. The prophets of the Old Testament Elijah, Amos, Isaiah, and others endured persecution for the sake of their mission and became models for believers as "prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord." Believers are called to follow their example, to continue hoping in God's promises, and to practice love.

● Gospel Reading: Matthew 11:2-11

While the disciples were engaged in missionary work throughout Galilee, John the Baptist had been imprisoned for denouncing the injustice of King Herod. Hearing reports about Jesus from his disciples, John sends them to Him, leading to this passage.

When John baptized Jesus, he knew Him partially as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), but he did not yet fully understand the complete picture of the Messiah His suffering and the cross. Therefore, he sends his disciples to ask Jesus whether He is truly the Messiah. At that time, many believed the Messiah would liberate the people from political oppression, and John struggled with the gentle, compassionate Jesus who stood alongside sinners.

Jesus does not declare, “I am the Messiah.” Instead, He points to His deeds, through which the prophecies are fulfilled such as the blind receiving sight (Isaiah 35:5?6; 61:1) and instructs them, “Go and tell what you hear and see.” He teaches that those who do not stumble over the gap between their expectations and His true identity, but instead accept Him, are truly blessed.

John is not “a reed shaken by the wind” nor “one dressed in fine clothes.”

He proclaims the coming of the Messiah and calls people to repentance (Isaiah 40:3).

He serves as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments and is the last prophet of the Old Covenant whose mission brings prophecy to fulfillment.

Jesus honors him uniquely as “more than a prophet.”

In the era of the New Testament, believers who are guided by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection are described by Jesus as “the least in the Kingdom of Heaven.” Yet He declares that the greatness and depth of the grace given to them surpass even that of John. To such believers comes a quiet joy (Philippians 4:4).

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