

SCRIPTURE READING FOR DECEMBER 11, 2022 @ CAPC OAKLAND

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

Isaiah is known as one of the greatest of the Hebrew prophets. The book bearing his name was composed before, during and after the defeat of Judah by the imperial powers of Assyria and Babylon between 740 BCE and 686 BCE. Remember that the prophets wrote in poetry, not prose, so their words are thick with metaphor and imagery.

the Holy Road :: in most historic translations it's "the Holy Way" – possibly painting the picture of the Way or Road upon which the exiled Israelites would cross back through the wilderness from Assyria/Babylon to return home.

Verses 5-7 :: This description of what it is like where God makes a way where there is no way is repeated in Matthew 11:1-6 when John the Baptizer wonder if Jesus is indeed the Messiah for whom John was supposed to prepare the way [road] (see Matthew 3:3)

John and his message were authorized by
Isaiah's prophecy:
Thunder in the desert!
Prepare for God's arrival!
Make the road smooth and straight!" -

Signs to relate to John that Jesus is the Messiah

¹When Jesus finished placing this charge before his twelve disciples, he went on to teach and preach in their villages.

²⁻³ John, meanwhile, had been locked up in prison. When he got wind of what Jesus was doing, he sent his own disciples to ask, "Are you the One we've been expecting, or are we still waiting?"

⁴⁻⁶ Jesus told them, "Go back and tell John what's going on:
The blind see,
The lame walk,
Lepers are cleansed,
The deaf hear,
The dead are raised,
The wretched of the earth learn that God is on their side.

"Is this what you were expecting? Then count yourselves most blessed!"

Matthew 11:1-6 (The Message Translation)

Isaiah 35:1-10

THE MESSAGE TRANSLATION BY EUGENE PETERSON

¹⁻² Wilderness and desert will sing joyously,
the badlands will celebrate and flower—
Like the crocus in spring, bursting into blossom,
a symphony of song and color.
Mountain glories of Lebanon—a gift.
Awesome Carmel, stunning Sharon—gifts.
God's resplendent glory, fully on display.
God awesome, God majestic.

³⁻⁴ Energize the limp hands,
strengthen the rubbery knees.
Tell fearful souls,
"Courage! Take heart!
God is here, right here,
on his way to put things right
And redress all wrongs.
He's on his way! He'll save you!"

⁵⁻⁷ Blind eyes will be opened,
deaf ears unstopped,
Lame men and women will leap like deer,
the voiceless break into song.
Springs of water will burst out in the wilderness,
streams flow in the desert.
Hot sands will become a cool oasis,
thirsty ground a splashing fountain.
Even lowly jackals will have water to drink,
and barren grasslands flourish richly.

⁸⁻¹⁰ There will be a highway
called *the Holy Road*.
No one rude or rebellious
is permitted on this road.
It's for God's people exclusively—
impossible to get lost on this road.
Not even fools can get lost on it.
No lions on this road,
no dangerous wild animals—
Nothing and no one dangerous or threatening.
Only the redeemed will walk on it.
The people God has ransomed
will come back on this road.
They'll sing as they make their way home to Zion,
unfading halos of joy encircling their heads,
Welcomed home with gifts of joy and gladness
as all sorrows and sighs scurry into the night.

Matthew 1:18-25

THE MESSAGE TRANSLATION BY EUGENE PETERSON

18-19 The birth of Jesus took place like this. His mother, Mary, was ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED to Joseph. Before they enjoyed their wedding night, Joseph discovered she was pregnant. (It was by the Holy Spirit, but he didn't know that.) Joseph, chagrined but NOBLE, determined *to take care of things quietly* so Mary would not be disgraced.

20-23 While he was trying to figure a way out, he had a dream. God's angel spoke in the dream: "Joseph, son of David, **don't hesitate** to get married. Mary's pregnancy is Spirit-conceived. God's Holy Spirit has made her pregnant. She will bring a son to birth, and when she does, you, Joseph, will name him Jesus—"God saves"—because he will save his people from their sins." This would bring the prophet's embryonic revelation to full term:

WATCH FOR THIS—

a *virgin* will get pregnant and bear a son; They will name him *Immanuel* (Hebrew for "God is with us").

24-25 Then Joseph woke up. He did exactly what God's angel commanded in the dream: He married Mary. But he did not consummate the marriage until she had the baby. He named the baby Jesus.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- What link do you see between the two texts?
- How is the conception/birth story of Jesus non-traditional?
- How do these texts touch what you're living, celebrating, and struggling with today?
- What invitation do you hear the Spirit of God speaking to you – or to us, as a church – to act, speak, be or change through this word of scripture?

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

ENGAGED TO BE MARRIED:: 'the audience hearing the gospel is expected to know the cultural practice of BETROTHAL, which begins the marriage agreement into which families entered. During the year or so before the marriage the couple were referred to as "husband" and "wife" (see Matthew 1:16, 19, & 20). The woman stayed with her family and the couple did not live together or engage in sexual intercourse as often this happened when the woman was quite young, 12 or 13 years old. In the eyes of society she was already the man's wife, so if she had sex with another man, she commits adultery. To break the BETROTHAL meant a bill of divorce.' (from *Matthew and The Margins*. Warren Carter, p. 67)

to take care of things quietly:: Joseph, unlike us the reader, knows nothing of God's intervention. He also knows that he isn't the father.

NOBLE:: the word in Greek is righteous which means one who does what God wants and prioritizes. It is a statement about Joseph in general not specifically the result of his desire to divorce Mary quietly without spectacle.

WATCH FOR THIS:: this verse is a citation of Isaiah 7:14. It was originally addressed to King Ahaz of Judah who was threatened by the greater northern powers of Syria and Israel. Isaiah assures Ahaz that their imperial plans to conquer Judah will fail because of God's faithfulness. God offers Ahaz and the people a sign, the birth of a child named Immanuel, which signifies that the King's Davidic line will continue, that the Syro-Ephraimite imperialism is doomed, and that God is present with the people. The sign invites the king to trust God, but he doesn't (Isaiah 7:1-17). Many have debated the identity of the pregnant young woman. In the context of Isaiah 7 it isn't Mary. The Hebrew text refers to "a young woman," and uses a noun that indicates her age (*almah*) | [עַלְמָה] not her sexual status (*bathulah*) | בְּתוּלָה (which would mean "virgin"). When translated into Greek (which was the version used by the Greek-speaking gospel authors) the Hebrew word *almah* is translated by the Greek word (*parthenos*) | [παρθένος] meaning specifically a sexual virgin. The claim that Jesus manifests God's presence is partially polemical. It challenges Roman imperial theology, which understood that the Roman emperor was the mediator of the presence of the gods in the world. (from *Matthew and The Margins*. Warren Carter, p. 71)

don't hesitate:: "Joseph, son of David, **do not be afraid** to take Mary as your wife..." Joseph is told to not be afraid of adopting the child that is not his biological offspring. He's also told not to be afraid of breaking the mosaic law, the social order that would demand he divorce Mary out of public outrage. Here at the beginning of the gospel an angel says what another angel will say at the end of the gospel "**Don't be afraid**, God is doing a new thing in the world." - Matthew 28:5.