

Isaiah 40:1-11

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

- <sup>1</sup> Comfort, O comfort my people,  
says your God.
- <sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and cry to her  
that she has served her term,  
that her penalty is paid,  
that she has received from the Lord's hand  
double for all her sins.
- <sup>3</sup> A voice cries out:  
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord;  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
- <sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.
- <sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all flesh shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken."
- <sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out!"  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"  
All flesh is grass;  
their constancy is like the flower of the field.
- <sup>7</sup> The grass withers; the flower fades,  
[[when the breath of the Lord blows upon it;  
surely the people are grass.
- <sup>8</sup> The grass withers; the flower fades,]  
but the word of our God will stand forever.
- <sup>9</sup> Get you up to a high mountain,  
O Zion, herald of good news;  
lift up your voice with strength,  
O Jerusalem, herald of good news;  
lift it up, do not fear;  
say to the cities of Judah,  
"Here is your God!"
- <sup>10</sup> See, the Lord God comes with might,  
and his arm rules for him;  
his reward is with him  
and his recompense before him.
- <sup>11</sup> He will feed his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms  
and carry them in his bosom  
and gently lead the mother sheep.

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

**Isaiah** The Book of Isaiah is one of the most important books of the Old Testament. While little is known of the personal life of the prophet, he is considered to be one of the greatest of them all.

The book is a collection of oracles, prophecies, and reports; but the common theme is the message of salvation. There was, according to these writings, no hope in anything that was made by people.

The setting of the first half of the book is Judah in the days of the Assyrians, and the setting of the second half of the book is Babylon, then Jerusalem again, and then beyond in the age to come. The "target audience" in the first half of the book is pre-exilic Israel; the "target audience" in the second half of the book is Israel during the exile and at the return (we know they are different; Isaiah did not). In both parts the oracles often look to the distant future for their main meaning and application. The fact that each section includes vivid descriptions as well as general and poetic descriptions has fueled controversy about the unity of the book and the prophet himself.

Taken from bible.org.

*wilderness*:: in both Hebrew מִדְבָּר pronounced /mid-bawr/ or in Greek ἔρημος pronounced /er'-ay-mos/ the word means wilderness and/or desert.

*like a shepherd*:: God as a shepherd is an image and metaphor used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, specifically in Psalm 23 and in Ezekiel 34:11-16 –

"<sup>15</sup> I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord God. <sup>16</sup> I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strays, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with justice."

Luke 1:24-45  
NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION

<sup>24</sup> After **those days** his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she remained in seclusion. She said, <sup>25</sup> “This is what the Lord has done for me in this time, when he looked favorably on me and took away *the disgrace I have endured* among my people.”

<sup>26</sup> **In the sixth month** the **ANGEL** Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a **VIRGIN** engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The **VIRGIN**’s name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” <sup>29</sup> But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. <sup>30</sup> The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. <sup>31</sup> And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. <sup>33</sup> He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

<sup>34</sup> Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a **VIRGIN**?” <sup>35</sup> The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will *overshadow you*; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. <sup>36</sup> And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God.”

<sup>38</sup> Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

<sup>39</sup> In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, <sup>40</sup> where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. <sup>41</sup> When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit <sup>42</sup> and exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. <sup>43</sup> And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? <sup>44</sup> For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.

LANGUAGE NOTES & TEXTUAL CONNECTIONS

**Luke ::** is one of the four gospels. Only in two (Luke and Matthew) is the story of Jesus’ birth told in detail. Luke’s gospel is written according to tradition by Luke, a disciple-intern of the apostle Paul. He was very cultured and educated as we see from his vocabulary and writing. Luke emphasizes the down-and-out, those on the margin or “misfits” and how Jesus the Messiah comes for all people. Today’s story about birth news shared by an angel appears in Matthew 1:18-25. But instead of Mary, it’s Joseph at the center of the story.

**those days::** this goes back to the preceding verses, pointing to the encounter of Zechariah in the Temple and promise of a son.

*the disgrace I have endured::* this points back to the narrative reality that despite living a blameless life, and being from a good family, her infertility, compounded by her old age she is harshly judged and rejected as less-than, a misfit, by society due to centuries of social convention (see Genesis 16:4, 11; 29:32; 30:1).\* (See Luke 1:7, 13)

**In the sixth month::** this dating again refers to the earlier parts of the story, the 6<sup>th</sup> month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy.

**VIRGIN::** In Greek. Παρθένος pronounced /*parthenos*/ meaning a maiden, virgin; extended to men who have not known women. Properly, a virgin; a woman who has never had sexual relations; a female (virgin), beyond puberty but not yet married. In Hebrew מַלְמָה pronounced /*almah*/ meaning a young woman, a virgin; a young woman (ripe sexually; maid or newly married); — Genesis 24:43, Exodus 2:8 (, Proverbs 30:19; Isaiah 7:14. Hebrew. The Greek term, used to translate the Hebrew term has a narrower meaning specifically in regards to be a virgin in terms of sexual intercourse. This word difference leads to a lack of clarity and disagreement about the interpretation of Isaiah 7:4 as it applies to this story of the angelic visit to Mary.

<sup>45</sup> And **blessed** is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.”

#### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & EXAMEN:

- What engaged you, enraged you, or surprised you in these texts?
- The words spoken by the prophet Isaiah paint the picture of dramatic transformation – hills made low, valleys lifted up into mountainous heights. God’s deliverance isn’t just spiritual or emotional, here it is physical – remaking (maybe re-creating?) the world. When have you experienced God’s promises and presence as radically transformative? How might you be looking, hungering, thirsting for such transformation in this weary time?
- Our gospel selection tells the story of two women isolated by their life situations who meet and share their experiences with one another. One is young and one is old. One is married and one is not yet married. They were both separate when they got news of God’s plans for their lives. Yet when they come together, they discover that their experiences are intimately connected. In that connection they share a radical joy. They come to each other probably looking for comfort and encouragement weary from their pregnancies, and unexpectedly find great joy. What are some experiences of social connection in which you have found great joy?
- 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

**Jesus::** In Hebrew the name is *Yeshua*, a form of Joshua. It means God [Ye-for YHWH] saves/liberates.

*reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end::* this citation is from the prophetic words in 2 Samuel 7:4-17:

“<sup>4</sup> But that same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, <sup>5</sup> “Go and tell my servant David: Thus says the Lord: Are you the one to build me a house to live in? <sup>6</sup> I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent and a tabernacle. ....

<sup>12</sup> When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. <sup>15</sup> But I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. <sup>16</sup> Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.” <sup>17</sup> In accordance with all these words and with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.?

*overshadow you::* this language is also used in Luke 9:34 and Exodus 16:10;24:15-18; 40:34-45 to indicate God’s presence. The language is figurative, not scientific.

**blessed::** the Greek word is μακάριος pronounced /mak-ar'-ee-os/ meaning happy, blessed, to be envied. It comes from *mak-*, "become long, large") – properly, when God extends His benefits (the advantages He confers); blessed. This is the same word used in the Beatitudes each time that Jesus says, " **Blessed** are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger..." (Matthew 5)