
² Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid,
for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; He has become my salvation.

³ With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation.

⁴ And you will say on that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name;
make known His deeds among the nations; proclaim that His name is exalted.

Isaiah 12:2-4 (NRSV)

The little girl was thrilled. It was like a dream come true. Her father had promised to one day take her to MovieWorld. And that day came. When they arrived, she headed straight for the roller-coasters. Dad was a bit worried—she hadn't been there before, and he thought the roller-coaster would be too scary for her. But no, she wanted to go. And so, they both got on—several times. A few years later, dad and daughter returned to the park. They joined the long line, and dad could see his daughter studying the signs that warned of the speed. "Dad, I don't think I want to go". He was a bit surprised. "Why be nervous about a ride you've enjoyed previously?" And she said "This year I can read".

Life is not predictable. There are ups and downs along the way. Many of us want to trust God. When times are good, it can feel easier. Life can be going along smoothly for a season. Your job is satisfying. Your friends and family are enjoyable. Your goals, finances, health and outlook seem bright. Then, all of a sudden, life throws a curveball. Someone you know gets sick. You lose your job. A friend or family member betrays you. The things you felt secure in all of a sudden feel shaky and uncertain. How do you trust that God is good in these circumstances? How do you trust Him when you do not understand what is happening? When you cannot see a resolution? But when times feel difficult, it is even more important to trust God. God's unchanging character can give us a firm foundation when things feel unsteady and uncertain.

In our Bible Reading for today (Isaiah 12:2-6) we have this word (Isaiah 12:2): "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the LORD GOD is my strength and my might; He has become my salvation." This is a word that obviously calls us to trust in God. It has been selected in relation to our other Reading for today, Zephaniah 3:14-20, which has this well known verse (v.14): "The LORD your God is in your midst, a Mighty One, who will save. He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will renew you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing."

When we watch the TV news, or read the 'news', we may wonder about the world in which we live, and what the future may hold. And when we come to our Bible Reading for our meditation this day (Isaiah 12:2-6), we may think we have a situation of a world that is similar to theirs. To be sure, the details are different — the Taliban was not a threat to Judah in the days of Isaiah, and Assyria does not dominate our own headlines — but the news of the day reminds us that always

there are events happening on a scale far beyond our reach and our ability to control them. Whether the threat is widespread, such as the worldwide economic crisis, or whether it is personal, such as illness, the loss of a job or the death of a loved one, it is no small thing to stare the menace in the face and say, “I will trust, and will not be afraid.”

But we know it is hard to always trust that “the LORD GOD is my strength and my might.” We may think and say in our mind, and with our words, that we “Trust in the Lord with all our heart, and we lean not on our own understanding; and in all our ways we acknowledge Him, for He directs our paths” (adapted from Proverbs 3:5–6). But then anxiety sets in and we want to work harder to make more money; or we seek to micro-manage others to have a sense of ‘being in control’; or we withdraw from faith-communities because we don’t want the pressure of seeing others seemingly ‘having it together’ and we don’t; or we put on that smile and say ‘Everything’s fine’ when we know our heart and mind are spinning; or we do any one of a number of things to try and have a sense of control over our own world.

The background to our Bible Reading today reminds us of our so-often human response to try to ‘problem solve’ and ‘being in in control – and what can happen when we do not truly ‘trust in the LORD’. Isaiah Chapters 7-12 tell of Isaiah’s dealings with King Ahaz, who fears Kings Rezin of Aram and Pekah of Israel, who have determined to attack Jerusalem. Ahaz, in his fear, wants to ask Tiglath-pileser of Assyria to come to his rescue. Isaiah counsels Ahaz to trust the LORD, not Assyria. But Ahaz seeks help from Assyria nevertheless. Isaiah says that Assyria will become the enemy, but Ahaz will not hear it. Isaiah foretells the coming of a righteous king who will bring peace (9:1-7), the judgment that Judah can expect (9:8 – 10:19), the survival of a faithful remnant (10:20-34), the establishment of a peaceful kingdom (11:1-9), and the return of the faithful remnant to Jerusalem (11:10-16). Chapter 12, a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, is the capstone of this section, telling of the great rejoicing that will take place when the faithful remnant returns to Jerusalem.

The first twelve chapters of Isaiah deal with the holiness of God and the sinfulness of both God’s people and the people of the world. In Isaiah 1 we find the complaint of the great God against His people: “*Hear, O heavens! Listen, O earth! For the LORD has spoken: ‘I reared children and brought them up, but they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his master, the donkey his owner’s manger, but Israel does not know, My people do not understand.’ Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption! They have forsaken the LORD; they have spurned the Holy one of Israel and turned their backs on Him*” (vv. 2-4). Then in Isaiah 6 there is a revelation of the transcendent God in all His holiness. The seraphs cry out, “Holy, holy, holy!” Suddenly, Isaiah becomes extremely self-conscious of his sinfulness and cries out, “*I am an unclean man, dwelling among people who are unclean.*” So there is this idea of the holiness of God and human sinfulness in the first chapters of Isaiah. What will holy God do about this situation? The holiness of God demands the obliteration of sin, and thus sinful people. But that is not what happened. God in His grace saves His people. So in Isaiah 12 we find this great hymn of praise and thanksgiving.

Throughout the prophecy of Isaiah there is an expression about 'the day of the LORD' (more than 64 times). When we come to Isaiah 12 it is actually a song that has 2 verses, each beginning with the phrase, "You will say in that day" (12:1, 4): "that day," when the pride of everyone shall be humbled and the LORD alone will be exalted (2:11, 17); "that day," when people will throw away their idols of silver and gold (2:20); "that day," when God will bring judgment against the women and men of Zion (3:16-26), when those who remain are called holy (4:2-3). "That day" is a day of judgment and salvation, a day that calls God's people forward, beckoning us to live into its reality in the present moment, no matter the circumstances.

The first song in this passage (verses 1-2) is sung by an individual (the "you" addressed in verse 1 is singular, as are the pronouns in verses 1-2), offering thanksgiving for deliverance by the God who is "my salvation" (verse 2). The second song (verses 4-6) offers a refrain of Thanksgiving to the "Holy One of Israel" (verse 6b), the one whose "name is exalted" (verse 4) and who "has done gloriously" (verse 5). The verse that ties these two songs together is addressed to the gathered community: "With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation" (verse 3).

This verse (Isaiah 12:3) is an expressive image in a hot country. People need water to live. Water is life. Many centuries later a practice had developed as part of the Feast of Tabernacles (the week leading up to Passover celebration). The Jews used to bring water in a golden pitcher from the fountain of Siloam, and pour it, mingled with wine, on the sacrifice on the altar with great rejoicing. This is the allusion in Jesus' words on the last day of the feast in John 7 where Jesus says (John 7:37-38): "Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me, and let the one who believes in Me drink."

This is our story. Christ the Rock was smitten on the cross, and rivers of living water are gushing out of him for the whole world. Now all sinners who die of thirst are invited to come, drink and live. God's anger has been turned away. Isaiah 10:25 predicted this and Isaiah 12 speaks of its fulfillment.

Isaiah 12 calls us to joyfully worship and delight ourselves in God because of what He has done and promises to do. In sending the Messiah, Jesus Christ, those in Him can have joy even in the midst of difficulties.

Isaiah spent his life trying to persuade people to trust in God, not be afraid and not give themselves to false saviours. His book makes the question unavoidable for us today: Will we trust God through our crises? Or will we fearfully surround our trust in God with mechanisms of self-help, just in case God fails? Do we feel secure with God alone?

Isaiah says, "Give thanks to the LORD," who has now become our salvation. He is the cause, the agent, and the accomplisher of our salvation, showing mercy to us who deserved only hell. This command to give thanks is a present imperative. We are to engage in continuous thanksgiving. We have the greatest reason in the world to give thanks.

The best way for us to thank God for His salvation is found in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. “For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, therefore all died” (v. 14). Jesus Christ died so we don’t have to die. We are spared from eternal death. Remember, Christ cried out, “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” He was experiencing hell on the cross. He died for all, but God accounts that we all died in Him, and now there is thanksgiving. “And He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him, who died for them and was raised again” (v. 15).

A Christian author once asked this question: “If you could have Heaven, with no sickness, with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven if Christ were not there?” I can’t. I can’t imagine it. I’d wonder where He is! After all I’ve learned about Him, I want to see Jesus. I want to be in His presence. I don’t want all of that and no Christ. Christ is heaven to me. He has become my salvation. It’s very personal. Is He your salvation?”

During this season of Advent, as media outlets continue their relentless proclamation of the world’s bad news, we wait — like the people of Isaiah’s time— for “that day” when God’s salvation will come to us in all its fullness. “Do not be afraid,” the angel will say, “I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people; to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11). We are drawn toward that future, ready to “shout aloud and sing for joy” together with the whole people of God who will proclaim, “Great in [our] midst is the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 12:6).

As we walk toward the great celebration of Christ’s advent into this world, and as we think about what this means for us – that we can trust in the Lord because He lives in our midst (around us, and within us) – God’s word in the Second Reading (Philippians 4:4-7) stand as a fitting conclusion: *“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

And you will say on that day: Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name; make known His deeds among the nations; proclaim that His name is exalted. Amen.

Almighty and eternal God, by Your Holy Spirit You have revealed to us the gospel of Your Son, Christ Jesus. Awaken our hearts that we may sincerely receive your Word and not make light of it, or hear it without fruit. Instead lead us to fear you and daily grow in faith in your mercy and finally through Your Son Christ Jesus, obtain eternal salvation. We ask this through Him who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen.