

Isaiah 11:1-10 (CEB)

- 1 A shoot will grow up from the stump of Jesse;
a branch will sprout from his roots.
- 2 The Lord’s spirit will rest upon him,
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of planning and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord.
- 3 He will delight in fearing the Lord.
He won’t judge by appearances,
nor decide by hearsay.
- 4 He will judge the needy with righteousness,
and decide with equity for those who suffer in the land.
He will strike the violent with the rod of his mouth;
by the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked.
- 5 Righteousness will be the belt around his hips,
and faithfulness the belt around his waist.
- 6 The wolf will live with the lamb,
and the leopard will lie down with the young goat;
the calf and the young lion will feed together,
and a little child will lead them.
- 7 The cow and the bear will graze.
Their young will lie down together,
and a lion will eat straw like an ox.
- 8 A nursing child will play over the snake’s hole;
toddlers will reach right over the serpent’s den.
- 9 They won’t harm or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain.
The earth will surely be filled with the knowledge of the Lord,
just as the water covers the sea.
- 10 On that day, the root of Jesse will stand as a signal to the peoples. The
nations will seek him out, and his dwelling will be glorious.

Matthew 3:1-6 (NRSV)

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ²“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” ³This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’”

⁴Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

Repeat the Sounding Joy: Loving Joy

From Psalm 98, translation: Nan C. Merrill

*Make a joyful noise to the Beloved all the earth;
Break forth into grateful song and sing praises!
Yes, sing songs of praise extolling Love’s way;
Lift up your hearts with gratitude and joy!*

“Joy to the World” verse 2

Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ; while fields and floods,
Rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy,
Repeat the sounding joy, repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

I have sung in choirs most of my life! Church choirs, school choirs, community choirs, clergywomen’s quartet...you name it, I enjoyed it! As I began to plan my higher education, heading to Lycoming College in Williamsport, PA, my plan was to attend college there for two years, and then to transfer to either Scarritt-Bennett College or Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN. I attended freshman orientation in the summer of 1978 at Lycoming, where each student was assigned a faculty advisor to walk us through registering for our first semester classes. Now mind you, I had been accepted as an accounting major (Ha, ha!), but since accounting was so popular among the incoming class, the advisor assigned to me was a music professor...and not just any music professor, it was Dr. Fred Thayer, who was also the choir director. Dr. Thayer recommended that I take mostly general education courses that first semester, in order to complete some of those requirements. And, since all of the first year accounting courses were already full, Dr. Thayer also suggested that I take a “special interest” course for my own enjoyment. Being familiar with the music department offerings, and having learned of my love of music, he suggested

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Music Theory I. That class had plenty of openings because it met five days a week (M-F) at 8:00 a.m.! Yes, as a freshman, I took music theory at 8am every day!! Oh, and Dr. Thayer added, you will certainly want to sign up for Choir. I did!

In that choir, I found all of the positive experiences I had in choirs of the past ~ multiplied exponentially! There was the opportunity for creative expression through most genre’s of music, the necessity to learn and perform at a higher level of excellence, acceptance into a tight social group, love and care for one’s peers. The college tradition was that on the first or second Sunday of December, the choir would lead the whole campus community in a candlelight Advent/Christmas service. It was glorious!!! By the end of that service my freshman year, I knew that I would never transfer away from Lycoming. That choir was the creative and stimulating family that I needed at that point in my life. And the music we created together gave glory to the God who had blessed me with faith and the desire to praise through music.

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The poetry from the prophet Isaiah and the cries of John the Baptist lend themselves well to our focus on the power of expressing our **hope** in God’s **love** through music and singing. We just joined our voices to sing, “Lo, how a rose e’er blooming, of tender stem hath spring....Of Jesse’s lineage coming, as those of old hath sung....” These are the words of Isaiah set to music. And of course the famed songwriter, Stephen Schwartz was called to put to music John the Baptist’s preaching in the musical “Godspell.” “Pre-e-e-pare ye the way of the Lord! (join in!) Pre-e-e-pare ye the way of the Lord!”

Something powerful happens when we raise our voices together, even for those who participate by listening. Song is created by breath and by vibrating sound waves; the music literally passes from one body to another, resonating within each person. What a delightful way to celebrate and

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remember loving joy, as we feel the reverberations deep within our souls offering praise to God.

Part of what makes music effective is the way it uses repetition and surprise. A memorable phrase, melody, or refrain will inspire us to draw closer to God, such as when we sing, “Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, when you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.” What will be our refrain during this Advent season? How will we learn to **“Repeat the sounding joy.”** as we await the birth of Christ? Will it touch the depths of our souls the way our heartstrings are caressed when we sing or hear “Amazing Grace” or “I Was There to Hear Your Bornin’ Cry”?

And where are the elements of surprise during this Advent season? When was the last time we tuned-in to hearing fields, floods, rocks, hills, and plains singing God’s praises? When was the last time we saw the lion and the lamb lie down together? The cow and the bear grazing together? The innocent child leading and the adults following? A prophet wearing garments made of camel’s hair as he shouts for all to hear that God is coming? Will the sight of a child resting in a manger repeat the sounding joy, or surprise us this year?

Is this the radical, self-revealing, self-sacrificing love of God which brings **us Loving Joy**? When ~ together ~ we experience the repeats and surprises of God’s continued activity in our midst, we see God’s love abiding among us. Pay attention! God is about to send someone to show us what love in the flesh looks like! Soon the Christ will be born!

DISMISSAL

And so, my friends, may you be blessed with a Loving Joy
That reverberates deep in your soul,
So that whatever life brings,
You are inspired to repeat the good news
That there are better ways of looking at the world,
Being in the world, bringing love to the world.