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December 11, 2022 ~ Third Sunday of Advent

**A Whole New World . . .**

**With a Wilderness of Joy** ([Isaiah 35:1-10](#); [Luke 1:47-55](#); opt. [James 5:7-10](#); [Matthew 11:2-5](#))

As our earth and its people struggle to survive the dramatic situations that climate change brings, Isaiah's promise of a wilderness of joy brings both hope and despair. As many states face another year of drought, wishing and hoping for rain and snowfall to heal their land, it's easy to forget God's promises to create streams in the desert and gladness in dry lands. But a dramatic "super bloom" colored the deserts of California a few years ago after many years of drought. Just one wet winter transformed the barren brown landscape into a vibrant color palette alongside gurgling streams that had once only been dry gulches. Imagine a world where the "super bloom" came to us every year. This is the opportunity that the Advent prophets proclaim each year. The Promised One is coming to bring God's promises back to our world and our lives.

Christ, the Living Water, comes to bring life back to our barren lives. In a world where a global pandemic has forever changed us and political unrest continues to further divide us, Christ the Prince of Peace and Lord of Lords promises a path of safety and security for all. Mary sings of this miracle of God's love and might. Look what love has done! She sings of strength for the downtrodden and abundance for the hungry, as she prepares to give birth to the One who is our strength and our sustenance. Look what love has done! Jesus brings sight to the blind, healing to the lame, cleansing to the outcast, and life to the dead. Look what love has done!

This life-giving nature of God's promises runs throughout all of scripture – from the first moment of creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) to rescuing the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. The life-giving message continues flowing from the prophetic promises of rescue from exile to the life-saving acts and promises of Jesus the Christ. These miraculous moments and prophetic promises came to the ancients in their saddest, most frightening times. As they faced slavery, oppression, exile, isolation, and violent regimes, God promised a new world, a world of joy even in the wilderness. Look what love has done! A child is born for us, healing is offered to us, and joy and gladness are offered to comfort our sorrow and wipe away our tears.

Sometimes, Advent preparations are so pensive and even somber that we neglect the promises within the prophecies. We can find ways to proclaim joy, even in the midst of a broken world, so that the world knows God's promises are still with us. Sharing signs of joy need not wait for Christmas morning. We can share gifts and greetings through the season, not just on December 25. We can visit or call those who are loneliest at this time of year. We can pause our busy schedules to celebrate a family night or time laughing with a friend. In this season of joy, we live into the promise of joy in the wilderness of life prophesied by Isaiah and by Mary.

This wilderness of joy is the joy we proclaim when we celebrate Christ's birth each year. Joy is born again and our hope is renewed, as we honor that God comes as a child and walks with us in our vulnerability. In the decorative lights shining in the dark days, our awareness is re-awakened that life is present even in the seemingly barren desert of a drought. In songs of joy, we are reminded that God comes to the world to grow blessings and rule with truth and grace, so that sin and sorrow no longer define our lives. In scriptures of love and peace, we are invited to bring love and peace into our relationships and our conversations. Look what love has done! Look what love might do – in us, through us, and for us. For we, too, can bring sight to the blind, healing to the broken, and life and light as it has been brought to us.