

**Spring Lake Presbyterian Church**  
**Pastor: Rev. Kathryn M. Treadway**  
**December 16, 2007**

**Matthew 11:2-11** <sup>2</sup>When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup>and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” <sup>4</sup>Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup>the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

<sup>7</sup>As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? <sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written, ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’ <sup>11</sup>Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

**Isaiah 35: 1-10** The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus <sup>2</sup>it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God. <sup>3</sup>Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. <sup>4</sup>Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.”

<sup>5</sup>Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; <sup>6</sup>then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; <sup>7</sup>the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes. <sup>8</sup>A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. <sup>9</sup>No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there. <sup>10</sup>And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

## A Brand New Highway

Tell anyone anywhere that a brand new highway is going to be put up and instant controversy will ensue. The commuters want to know if it will get us from here to there faster. The hometown-ers want to know if it will divide their property. And miscellaneous others worry about road noise, and congestion, and new development, and the loss of the familiar will erupt. In my husband’s hometown, a new highway was built about 8 years ago that blasted a tunnel through the mountain, cutting travel time from TN to KY by at least 30 minutes and increasing safety exponentially. You see, the highway used to go over the mountain. I know. While Bill and I were dating we made several trips over the mountain and the narrow curves frequently caused my fear level to reach new heights. And so a way THROUGH the mountain came as a blessed joy to me and my stomach. But for those businesses located along the old highway, the realignment of traffic through a new route meant a loss in the long-established business. For those who appreciated the small town with its highway rarely traveled by outsiders, the new highway meant more traffic, more people, and new development – in other words: growth. And “growth” didn’t have the appeal in Eastern TN as it might have for a church like the Spring Lake Presbyterian Church.

In today’s reading from Isaiah, we hear about a highway in the desert. But before we get all nervous about a new highway upsetting the eco-system of the desert, listen to the WORDS of Isaiah. *The wilderness and the*

*dry land shall be glad, the desert shall rejoice and blossom; like the crocus <sup>2</sup>it shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice with joy and singing.* In other words, the building of THIS highway will bring forth abundance where before there was simply scarcity. The dry land shall be **GLAD** – think of the joy we have seen over the last few days as rain as come to our dry yards. The land is glad – it can naturally reproduce. Imagine, if you will, that a highway is cause for the celebration of the land! *They shall see the glory of the LORD, the majesty of our God* And I love the next line of scripture – especially for this congregation with so many knee surgeries and arthritis sufferers: <sup>3</sup>*Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.* <sup>4</sup>*Say to those who are of a fearful heart, “Be strong, do not fear! **Here is your God.** He will come with vengeance, with terrible recompense. He will come and save you.”*

As God arrives in our deserts, there is no need to complain, no need to fear. For God will sweep in and change our winters to spring, change our pain into joy, change our sorrow into rejoicing, change our fear into hope.

I am a visual person and so when I read these words, I see in my mind the story of Hans Christian Anderson’s “Snow Queen” where we have all been frozen for so long, but suddenly, because of one girl’s love, our hearts of ice melt and our white worlds give way to flowers blooming before our eyes. When God walks into our world, spring erupts before our eyes – flowers blooming, birds singing. <sup>5</sup>*Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; <sup>6</sup>then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy. For waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert; <sup>7</sup>the burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water; the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp, the grass shall become reeds and rushes.* It’s as though Isaiah is writing with the imagination of a Disney animator quick to bring a happy ending to our life’s story – Ariel the mermaid can suddenly walk, Beauty and the Beast’s beast becomes a handsome prince, Snow White awakens with just a single kiss, Sleeping Beauty awakens from her endless sleep.

But because it’s in the Bible, in the OT scriptures, we read it with more than just a fairy tale genre in mind. We hear rather the truth amid the animation. We hear that there is hope in the desert of our lives, for God is coming near.

That is the hope of Advent, is it not? We hope for a light to break into our darkness; we hope for safety from all of the terrors of our world. Like a child running to “base” in a simple game of tag, we hope for safety from all of the anxieties of this world. The hope of our world, God-with-us, changes the entire eco-system of the desert into a blossoming wonderland. The hope of our world, Jesus Christ, interrupts our darkness and brings us hope.

Many of you know that we’re homeschooling our kids this year, and I particularly have enjoyed learning alongside them. We’ve spent the first part of this year studying ancient history – Mesopotamia, Egypt, China, India – and as we studied the Sahara Desert in Northwestern Africa, I was amazed to learn that archaeologists had discovered petroglyphs (ancient rock drawings) of crocodiles in the middle of the desert, telling us that at one time the desert was probably fertile, most likely with a river running through the entire region.

A river through the desert – a highway of sorts bringing life, fertility, blossoms, food, security, and hope where common knowledge would never expect it.

We all live in various deserts, despite our tropical landscapes. We experience pain – when family members fail to live as we had hoped they would; when distance separates us from those we love; when illness diverts our attention from the rest of reality; when uncertainty tears us from our hope; when financial worries consume our sensibilities; when the tears of loss roll down our hearts. But behold, <sup>8</sup>*A highway shall be there, and it shall be called the Holy Way; the unclean shall not travel on it, but it shall be for God’s people; no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray. <sup>9</sup>No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it; they shall not be found there, but the redeemed shall walk there.* The pain will be gone!!!! <sup>10</sup>*And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

The hope of God during this time of Advent is that the hope of the world is being born among us. We need not resist for when the Hope of the world is born among us <sup>5</sup>*the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them.* The weak hands shall be made strong! The feeble knees shall be made firm. Do not be afraid to hope in the midst of your particular darkness or even in the midst of the world's common darkness. For there is a brand new highway, and we are all free to walk upon it, holding on to "base" for eternity. And there we and others whom the Lord calls shall be safe, and we will bloom as we worship the One who has been born among us. O come let us adore Him. Amen.