

## Today's Advent Devotional Is Offered by Rev. Dr. Robin Hawley Gorsline

### Sounds of Joy

Joy sounds without ceasing in traditional  
and untraditional voices  
when we listen.

A strange man named John arises out of the wilderness  
sounding like the crazy man wandering the streets  
muttering and yelling incantations  
we do not understand, or if we do  
not wishing to hear as we bustle to and fro  
from work to home to shopping, maybe even a party  
where we gather to celebrate the Savior's birth  
with too much food and drink.  
He is not Isaiah though he uses the prophet's words  
to declare his mission: big things are coming and the Lord  
is on his way!



He is far from the first to proclaim  
big God news.  
Isaiah himself tells us a shoot shall  
come from the stump  
of Jesse and a new branch, a new  
David, will arise  
to change everything, all the  
predators will cease,  
their victims shall not only breathe  
easy  
but all will lie down in peace and  
plenty,

a glorious vision for humans while denying animal ways of survival—and it cannot be disconnected from Isaiah's immediately prior verses where stumps are created by a divine being angry at the undoing of life, the distortion of human relationships, by people who profess to love God. Cedars of Lebanon are cut down in response to perfidy by God's people, an odd but powerful instigation to create joy in the face of loss and death.

Strange John also points with alarm at the practitioners of unholy or at least mixed religious rule and greed for lofty stations based on public pieties of his day—we might include as Isaiah does those who trample on the economically distressed and disempowered from their high towers of privilege and gold-fixtured bathrooms—even as we pray for the souls of all, proclaiming the reign of God, singing Come, O Come, Emmanuel, ransom captive Israel.

But who is captive? Israel then as now for sure to fear of neighbors and desire to stride regionally, but closer to home are we not captive as well, enthralled by our own national virtue, sure of the rightness of our cause in the world as we bicker and stab each other at home, unwilling to provide health care for all, end violence on our streets and campuses by controlling guns and transforming dead-end lives on mean streets through shared commitment to the well-being of all no matter color, nation, religion, gender and all the rest.

Could this Advent be a time not only to honor

tradition—getting ready in the usual ways  
for Jesus, Mary, Joseph, shepherds, angels, and wise men—  
but also to break with tradition and turn the world upside down  
by hearing and repeating God's joy in all its variety and power?

Meditation on Isaiah 11:1-10, Matthew 3:1-12