

Our Song Transformed

[Isaiah 35:1-10](#)

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You might have recognized some of the tunes in today's Cantata – there were a lot of famous Scottish and Irish melodies that the composer used to tell the story of Jesus' birth. At choir practice every time we started a new piece, I'd usually recognize the melody but didn't know exactly where it came from, so at one point I went on the internet and I searched for the original songs these tunes came from. And I have to say, all those original songs are incredibly depressing. They're all about lost love, or dying in battle, or losing your love because he died in battle, and somehow it's always England's fault. And at first glance, you might think that taking such depressing songs – with lines like “burned are our homes, exile and death” – and turning them into Christmas carols, it doesn't quite fit. We think Christmas is supposed to be happy and jolly and full of laughter and fun, and a bunch of dead Scotsmen doesn't sound very festive.

But I actually think these tunes are perfect for Christmas, because Christmas isn't actually meant to be happy or jolly. It's meant to be joyful. God never promises to make us happy. God promises us joy. In our scripture reading this morning, God makes all these beautiful promises through the prophet Isaiah, but those promises come to people who are in trouble – people living in the wilderness

and the desert, people with weak hands and feeble knees, to the blind and the deaf, the lame and the speechless, God sends this promise – be strong, and do not fear. Here is your God. He is coming to save you. And that promise is enough to bring strength to those with weak hands, to make firm those with feeble knees. That promise is enough to set the lame dancing and give the speechless a new song of joy. God never promises to those who are comfortable, you will be comfortable forever. God never promises to those who are on top, you will stay on top forever. God's promises are for those on the bottom, the lost and lonely and cast down and oppressed, God promises to be their God, to come to them and rescue them and give them a new song to sing, to give them a reason for joy. If you know that God is with you, if you know that God is coming to save you, then even if you're been stuck in the wilderness, even if your hands feel weak and your knees feel feeble, you have a reason to rejoice.

And that's what happened at Christmas. That's what happened in Bethlehem. God entered into this world to be Emmanuel, God with us. God came to save us from every trouble, to ransom us from sin and death and set us free and give us joy. In Jesus Christ, God has re-written our songs, taken the old tunes of sorrow and war and death and given us new words for our old songs, so that instead of despair, we have hope, instead of conflict, we have peace, instead of sorrow, we have joy. God has promised us that we will see the glory of the Lord,

that our eyes and ears will be opened, our way made clear through the desert, that everything that keeps us from celebrating God's goodness and love will one day be conquered and destroyed, once and for all. And until that day comes, God calls us to sing, to let Jesus Christ rewrite our songs of sorrow and death and transform them into songs of joy, because we know God is with us, and as long as we can see God's glory here in our midst, we will always have reason for joy. Thanks be to God! Amen.