

December 6, 2020  
Rev. Jane Florence  
Text: Isaiah 40: 3-5  
Title: Looking East



Listen with me to this text from the prophet Isaiah:

<sup>3</sup> *A voice cries out:*

*In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

<sup>4</sup> *Every valley shall be lifted up,  
and every mountain and hill be made low;  
the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.*

<sup>5</sup> *Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,  
and all people shall see it together,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'*

In my family when I was a child, way back when, Christmas decorations were allowed to go up only the day AFTER Thanksgiving. To do so before Thanksgiving was disrespectful to God. According to my mother, putting them up before the day of giving thanks would be to slight God. Evidently preparing for the birth of Jesus was not to mingle with giving thanks to God. Either that or about four weeks was as long as a cut tree could be expected to keep a needle in south Texas. Slowly over the years, Christmas decor began to creep onto store shelves and into homes earlier and earlier. First, inching out the November turkey, then threatening the October goblins. But hey, this is 2020! In March of this year, people started putting up Christmas lights- cause we needed a little Christmas right that very moment. We needed a little Christmas cheer this spring. #ChristmasLights in March. Those that put up their lights at the beginning of spring actually had some support thematically theologically. Ancient people decorated with evergreen branches during the dark days of winter, brightening their homes and reminding them that life would return in the springtime. All the greens around your house- trees, garland, wreaths, - ever greens - announcing life eternal - in the midst of winter's barren trees and frozen ground. If not in March, Christmas lights went up for many way before their usual time this year.

Today began worship with an Advent hymn that gives permission even encouragement to our Christmas decorations. "Make your house fair as you are able, trim the hearth and set the table". Advent is the church season of preparation and there are lots that goes into preparing for the birth of a child, decorating the space is only part of it. There is more to preparing for Christmas than holly trim. The poem leaves the warmth of the home and journeys to the world also preparing, despite the dark and cold of the coming winter.

*Furrows be glad Though earth is bare, One more seed is planted there:*

I am not a farmer, but I know that winter solstice is not planting time. However, the earth that appears dead is, in fact, nourishing the seeds of new life that will sprout. Even if

it looks like the earth is shutting down for winter, we are given hope and reminded that new life lies buried beneath snowfall and will wait for its time to emerge.

The song is full of earthy images, seeds being planted, and nourished and in time flourishing. Stars in the sky, frosty weather, as sister sun and brother moon shine together. Every peak and valley is humming in preparation.

The carol depicts the whole earth preparing and awaiting and manifesting this one we await who is known by the name LOVE. LOVE, the guest, Love the Rose, Love the Star, Love, the Lord is on the way. The Cosmic Christ comes to earth and sky and field and us in many a form all bearing the name Love, so People look East. The carol reminds us that, from ancient times, the Church has faced east to pray. Religious and spiritual folk from long ago looked to the east, for each rising of the sun messages a new day dawning, a new day full of possibilities for new life. The same message is echoed in a popular Afro-American spiritual which says, "when I fall on my knees, with my face to the rising sun, O Lord, have mercy on me."

"People, Look East" is an instruction, an encouragement, a pleading, and an orchestrating for humanity to see as one to the East where the dawn ushers in the gift of light shining on all. Dawn erases the dark fears of night. It illuminates that which is being sought. It provides warmth and brings a new day. "Angels are coming with shouts of mirth!" Who can ignore the mirthfulness of a laughing angel to greet your morning awakening?

Eleanor Farjeon (1881-1965) received much encouragement as a writer from her parents. "Nellie," as she was affectionately called by her parents, was a small, shy young girl with a vivid imagination. Her father encouraged her to write from the age of five. At age eighteen, she wrote the text for an operetta composed by her brother. In England where she grew up, she is beloved as the author of more than eighty children's books, but in the US she is best-known for this song and another of her songs

"Morning Has Broken" which rose to fame on the pop charts in the 70s.

*like the first morning... praise for the singing, praise for the morning*

*praise with elation, praise every morning,*

*God's re-creation of the new day!*

People look East, to the glory of the gift this new day! People look East, trim the hearth and set the table; prepare ye the way, so

*Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together,*

Homes, mountains, valley, tables, hearts, all sharing together the hope and promise of a new day when all are welcome at the feast of God's love.

May it be so.