

**Lectionary readings: Isaiah 35: 1-10; Psalm 146: 5-10;
James 5: 7-10; Matthew 11: 2-11 (Third in Advent)**

For reflection and prayer

- **Isaiah 35:** This is a passage full of hope. The barren, waste areas of our lives can blossom, and become a riot of colour and fill us with great joy, as we open ourselves up to God's presence and allow His transforming power to work in us. He wants us to move from fear to faith; He wants to heal us and make us whole; He wants to open our blind eyes to His glorious presence in our lives, our deaf ears to His voice. He wants us to be filled with His life-giving presence. He wants us to be a 'highway of holiness', following His leading, our lives lit up by His presence. This is the Kingdom of God that is being described here. It is ours to experience here and now. This is cause for rejoicing indeed. It's also a call for us to strengthen and affirm one another and encourage one another to let God be to us all He wants to be.
- **Psalm 146:** This is a Psalm of joy, praising God, our Beloved, in whom we find our strength and our hope. Our God is a God who wants to set us free from the prisons we have made for ourselves, all those things that weigh us down and restrict us. He has nothing but love in His heart for all and He wants us to reach out in love to all too - foreigners, those who are weak and oppressed, disadvantaged and marginalised. Lord, help us to welcome You into our hearts and lives this week that we might become beacons of light to those who are living in darkness.

- **James 5:** We must not sit back, but yoke ourselves with God to bring in His Kingdom. We are called to live as He wants us to - not pleasing ourselves, not criticising one another, but reaching out in love, and taking responsibility for our shortcomings, allowing God into them to transform us, so that we live to glorify Him. We might like to look back over our lives each day this week and reflect on when self has been in control and when we have allowed God into our lives and the feelings that have arisen, positive and negative. What do our feelings tell us about the thoughts that lie behind them?
- **Matthew 11:** John the Baptist was in prison and, understandably, beginning to doubt whether Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus doesn't reply with a 'yes', but says that the blind see, the lame walk, the suffering are healed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life and good news proclaimed to all. What a message! If we were asked today who this Jesus is and what He can do, I wonder what our response would be? Are we allowing God to heal us, to bring to life the areas of our lives that are dead, to unstop our ears so that we hear God's message of love in new ways that can transform us? As Christmas approaches, people are going to be drawn to Jesus only if they see God making a difference in our lives, bringing us to life, transforming us so that we become living messages of hope to those who are burdened and weighed down.

A prayer

Lord, as we prepare to welcome the coming Christ, so give us grace to reflect the living Christ and become channels of hope to a broken and often despairing world. Amen