

55 All of you who are thirsty, come to the water!  
Whoever has no money, come, buy food and eat!  
Without money, at no cost, buy wine and milk!

2 Why spend money for what isn't food,  
and your earnings for what doesn't satisfy?  
Listen carefully to me and eat what is good;  
enjoy the richest of feasts.

3 Listen and come to me;  
listen, and you will live.  
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,  
my faithful loyalty to David.

4 Look, I made him a witness to the peoples,  
a prince and commander of peoples.

5 Look, you will call a nation you don't know,  
a nation you don't know will run to you  
because of your God,  
the holy one of Israel, who has glorified you.

6 Seek God when love can still be found;  
call God while love is yet near.

7 Let the wicked abandon their ways  
and the sinful their schemes.  
Let them return to God so that love may have mercy on them,  
to our God, because love is generous with forgiveness.

8 My plans aren't your plans,  
nor are your ways my ways, says God.

9 Just as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways,  
and my plans than your plans.

10 Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky  
and don't return there without watering the earth,  
making it conceive and yield plants  
and providing seed to the sower and food to the eater,

11 so is my word that comes from my mouth;  
it does not return to me empty.  
Instead, it does what I want,  
and accomplishes what I intend.

12 Yes, you will go out with celebration,  
and you will be brought back in peace.  
Even the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you;  
all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

13 In place of the thorn the cypress will grow;  
in place of the nettle the myrtle will grow.  
This will attest to God's stature,  
an enduring reminder that won't be removed. (Common English Bible)

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The prophet Isaiah was speaking to exiles, to people who felt abandoned by God, and who may have forgotten God's promises to them. It was nearly time for the return to Jerusalem and the hard work of rebuilding that ruined city. He needed to inspire them to make that journey and do that work.

To get the exiles to listen the prophet had to get them to realize they are thirsty, hungry, not satisfied with the stuff of their daily lives— needed to trigger yearning to get them to turn back to God. So he calls out to them, like a vendor in a market place, like the guy selling peanuts at the circus, or beer at the baseball game, promising free food, free drink, good food, good drink, not just good for you, but good, rich, delightful... good... truly, deeply satisfying. The only price for purchasing this good, satisfying food and drink? Admit that you need it.

Right now, for many, God seems far, far off. The thoughts and ways of God seem like wishful thinking or even nonsense. At moments like this it is easy to put our trust in other things, other beings, it is easy to worship our jobs, our families, food or other substances, because they seem so much more immediately gratifying. But if we are honest none of this is ultimately satisfying. The stuff of this world can satisfy for only a moment, but cannot satiate. Only God can feed our deepest hungers. Only God can quench our deepest thirsts. And God will. Because God already has. That's what we celebrate on Christmas.

May the music with which we will soon be blessed help us to get in touch with our own thirst and hunger, and deep down yearning, to be opened to something much more than we often believe is even possible— and to remind us that we are prepared, by God's generous provision. Let's admit we need this.