

# IN EXCELSIS DEO

## ADVENT 2024

**Thursday, December 5**

**Read: Isaiah 40:1-5**

A junior-high crush figuring in an Advent meditation? Well, sometimes.

When I was in ninth grade, a new family moved to town and joined our church. I met their son who was a year older than I, and who was studying to be a concert pianist. Up to that point I was mostly familiar with country music and hymns and I idolized people who were expert performers of those. But then I heard Dennis play the crashing chords of Chopin and Beethoven and I fell, hard. I was in love.

Dennis was not. But he stayed friendly and I lived with hope. Our church had a Hammond H electronic organ that Dennis knew how to play. When I expressed interest, he offered to teach me to play it. That meant sessions alone with Dennis? Sign me up. To the first lesson he brought his copy of Handel's Messiah. I had never heard it, but I was soon playing the first recitative, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people! Saith your God!"

As our lessons progressed, my crush remained unrequited, but Dennis sparked in me a love for the "Messiah." It uses many passages from the book of Isaiah, but that soaring promise of tender love, "Comfort ye my people, saith your God!" is still my favorite. I am grateful I became familiar with it at a young age.

Today's passage is from the "second part" of Isaiah that begins with chapter 40. The Jewish people have long been living in exile, away from home, away from a temple where they could worship their God. Then, unexpectedly, King Cyrus the Great is allowing the Jewish people to return home. A messenger is proclaiming "Comfort! There will be a straight highway on level ground" and "The glory of the Lord will be revealed!" Handel wrote some of his greatest music to go with these joyous promises.

We are addressing these verses during Advent because the gospel writers in Jesus' time saw these verses as foreshadowing John the Baptist as messenger and Jesus as the Messiah, the glory of the Lord.

Have comfort! Jesus is coming, saith your God!

Pat Parish