

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from His roots shall bear fruit” (Isaiah 11:1).

Today’s Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 11 pictures life rising from death and destruction.

Through the Prophet Isaiah, God promised that He would deliver His people from all their enemies. Yet, as Isaiah proclaims this great news, the Assyrians are about to inflict God’s judgment upon God’s people for their wickedness. And over the centuries, God’s people would be cut down and reduced to virtually nothing. And over time, the Assyrian Empire would be cut down and reduced to nothing. Every enemy of God’s people, as well as God’s people themselves, would become stumps of their former greatness.

But in today’s reading, Isaiah tells of a difference, a great difference. You see, all the other stumps would remain dead and lifeless, but not this stump of Jesse. He says a shoot would come from the stump of Jesse.

Yes, the house of David would be reduced to its humble beginnings in Bethlehem – the birthplace of Jesse and of his son David, but from these humble beginnings would come a new King, who is not only of the lineage of David, but a new and greater David.

It was unexpected that a boy who tended his father’s sheep would become a great king. It was also from an unexpected source that the new and greater King would come.

Just as Immanuel would come from a virgin, so He also would come from the dead stump of Jesse. Here, we see a humble entrance of the Christ into the world – as a child, a shoot. He would come by the miracle of a virgin birth and would come from the dead stump of the royal line of David. The small green branch would shoot out and grow because God had given His promise. It would be so. The appearance of this shoot is a miracle of God’s grace and power.

How beautiful Isaiah pictures the coming Messiah. When the shoot becomes a branch at the appointed time, He was born in Bethlehem, the hometown of both Jesse and David. And although Mary and Joseph were both descendants of David, Jesus would not have His first bed in a palace but in a manger.

At the time of Christ's birth, Romans occupied Palestine. There was no descendant of David ruling Judah. Mary was just a humble woman. Joseph a carpenter. Nazareth, where Mary and Joseph lived was a forgotten town in Judea. What good could come from Nazareth, let alone Bethlehem? The royal line of David was a dead stump without power, influence or wealth.

Yet, from this seemingly insignificant beginning, great and wonderful blessings would come. This new and greater King would succeed where all other kings and leaders have failed. Really, all earthly rulers would ultimately fail. But where all other earthly rulers have failed, this Branch will succeed. You see, where all other earthly rulers have fallen, this Branch will not fail because He will be what God desires, and He will fully do what God desires.

Of this Branch, the Spirit of the Lord rests. Isaiah writes: ***“And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord”*** (Isaiah 11:2).

Jesus, the shoot from the stump of Jesse, and the son of David, went forth ***“full of the Spirit”*** (Luke 4:1) and manifested Himself before all Israel. At His Baptism, the Spirit of God descended on Him like a dove and came to rest on Him.

Upon Jesus rests God's own Spirit and this Spirit gives Him everything He needs to rule.

And what does this Spirit give Jesus? Isaiah here identifies three pairs of gifts. The first pair is wisdom and understanding. You see, during His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated a wisdom which had been hidden from the beginning of the world and He spoke and gave insight into heavenly things which only He knows. With His wisdom, Jesus has the ability to look into the very essence of things. He has the understanding to distinguish and perceive differences. With wisdom and understanding, He gives insight into all things that His people will need to know and understand, including the depths of God's nature and His grace.

Upon Jesus also rests the Spirit of counsel and might. These two gifts also echo the names given to the promised Messiah back in Isaiah chapter 9, where he wrote that the Christ Child's name shall be called "***Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God***" (Isaiah 9:6). This means that He knows what His people need and gives them what they need. He gives His people His Word and in His Word, He shares with His people the plan for our redemption. By His suffering and death, the shoot from the stump of Jesse, loosed the bonds which held people captive and overcame our enemies: sin, death, and the devil.

Upon Jesus also rests the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. During His earthly ministry, Jesus was obedient to His Father's will, even unto death, to lead us – *His lost children* – back to God. Now, through the Holy Spirit, the Lord plants the knowledge of God, true love and true fear of God, back into the hearts of men.

Now with His work finished, Jesus, the shoot from the stump of Jesse, the new and greater David, now sits on the throne of His Father. "***And His delight shall be in fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what His eyes see, or decide disputes by what His ears hear, but with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His waist, and faithfulness the belt of His loins***" (Isaiah 11:3-5).

With the Spirit of the Lord resting upon Him, when Jesus makes decisions, He penetrates beyond what He can see and hear. And as careful as any human judge or ruler may be, appearances and rhetoric can still distort the truth and frustrate justice. But not for the shoot from the stump of Jesse, the new and greater David. For Jesus, He exercises absolute justice based on absolute knowledge.

Jesus bears the scepter of peace. Again, He doesn't judge by what His eyes see or decide disputes by what His ears hear, but He judges with righteousness, deciding with equity the interests of the meek. To troubled sinners, Jesus gives justice. He makes us poor, miserable sinners right with God by covering our sin with His robe of righteousness and preserving us blameless to God the Father.

But at the very same time, those who reject the shoot from the stump of Jesse, those who reject His peace and His grace, those people are put to shame. Isaiah says: "***He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked***" (Isaiah 11:4).

Jesus has come as the Prince of Peace, but many reject His peace. Not everyone will believe. Not everyone will come to faith in Christ Jesus. As Simeon said to Mary, ***“This Child has been appointed for the fall ... of many”*** (Luke 2:34). But, through the working of the Holy Spirit, many more will come and kneel before the crucified and risen Christ.

And for everyone who clings to Christ as their King, they will see the image of creation restored. Animals that were once prey – *the lamb, young goat and fattened calf* – will dwell safely together with their former predators – *the wolf, leopard and lion* – without fear. In fact, as believers in Christ, we already enjoy the benefits of His wise rule, having received His Spirit with wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, and knowledge and fear of the Lord.

You see, for those who are in the kingdom of God, there is no malice. For everyone who acknowledge Jesus as Lord also renounce the works of the devil. And although we are still sinners, in Christ, there remains an ever-flowing fountain of mercy. Day in and day out, we receive from Jesus His grace, as well as peace and strength in loving God and serving our neighbor.

Isaiah pictures paradise as the wolf dwells with the lamb, but this paradise isn't just the future; this is the present reality. This is what the Church of Christ looks like now. This is the peace that the one true Christian Church has at this very moment.

As fellow redeemed in Christ, we are united with the One who alone is holy by nature but who shares His holiness with us. God has granted us new hearts that, while sin still clings to us, we truly want to please God and serve our neighbor. This is completely unnatural from the perspective of our old sinful and prideful selves. We have been transformed by Christ's peace through His suffering, death, resurrection and ascension! We have been transformed by the Holy Spirit's intervening in your life to be the kind of person you would never be without Him.

Yes, we are still not perfect, the Church does have her spots and wrinkles, but we are made clean through the blood of the Lamb, which makes us new. With the help of the Holy Spirit, may we grow in wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and fear of the Lord, for we are all one in Christ Jesus, who is Peace and brings peace. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +