

Advent 2

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December 9, 2001

Prayer of the Day

Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming give us strength in our conflicts and shed light on our path through the darkness of this world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen

Isaiah 11:1-10

{1} A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. {2} The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. {3} His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; {4} but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. {5} Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins. {6} The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. {7} The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. {8} The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. {9} They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. {10} On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Yahweh sent Assyria to punish apostate Israel, but Assyria had her own agenda; therefore Yahweh will punish her (10:5ff). Israel will be restored, a remnant will return from Assyria (10:20ff).

1. *A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse:* "...the emphasis of v. 1 falls on the new life sprouting from the mutilated house of David.... The stress lies on the rebirth, which does not emerge from the proud Davidic dynasty but from the ancient, uncorrupted stem of Jesse." [1] Jeremiah develops the image of the "branch" in Jeremiah 23:5f. as a new Davidic line.

2-5: Gifts of the spirit of Yahweh grace this new shoot. It provided the basis for the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit developed by "Augustine, Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas on the basis of Ixx, which adds "piety" to make the seven." [2] Lutherans, and perhaps others, pray for these gifts for their confirmands, adding "the spirit of joy in your presence" as the seventh gift. The gifts are focused on the administration of justice.

wisdom and understanding: The observance of the law will show the wisdom and understanding of the people which will be recognized by the Gentiles (Deuteronomy 4:6).

counsel and might: The skill to develop and implement plans, skills useful for ruling.

knowledge and fear of the Lord: Knowledge is subordinate to and controlled by fear of the Lord.

6-9: The future will a return to the conditions of creation, where primal harmony and universal peace will prevail for both animals and humans. "...the portrayal of universal

peace...is set within an eschatological context...and is an expansion of the picture of the future harmony among the peoples who flow to the holy mountain." [3] Verse 9a is quoted in Isaiah 65:25b; verse 9b, in Habakkuk 2:14. The restoration of the Davidic dynasty and the restoration of peace are a consequence of "the knowledge of the Lord." The inclusion of animals in the renewal calls to mind the covenant with Noah (Genesis 9:9), which includes both "you and every living creature of all flesh...."

10: This verse introduces a series of additions to the prophecy in 1-9. Here it is the root of Jesse" itself, not the branch which grows from it that will rally the nation.

the nations: Literally, *goyim*, "the nations," "the Gentiles." The *goyim* will be welcome to inquire of Yahweh. Indeed, they will even become priests in the Temple (Isaiah 66:21).

Psalms 72:1-7, 18-19

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. {2} May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice. {3} May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. {4} May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor. {5} May he live while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. {6} May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. {7} In his days may righteousness flourish and peace abound, until the moon is no more. {18} Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. {19} Blessed be his glorious name forever; may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.

1-2, 4: The verses take up the theme of the king as a just judge.

3, 5-7: The psalmist prays for prosperity and refreshment for the people and long life for the king.

18-19: These two verses are frequently characterized as the conclusion to the second book of the Psalter rather than a part of the Psalm.

Romans 15:4-13

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope. {5} May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, {6} so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. {7} Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. {8} For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, {9} and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing praises to your name"; {10} and again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people"; {11} and again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him"; {12} and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope." {13} May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

4. *the scriptures*: In parallel with "whatever was written in former days," the scriptures are the writings of the Old Testament (see also 4:23).

5. *to live in harmony with one another*: The Christian community in Rome was made up of a number of groups of believers who worshipped in "house churches." Paul prays that God will provide the necessary encouragement for harmony among these groups.

7. *Welcome one another...just as Christ has welcomed you*: Christ's conduct is a pattern for Christian conduct (1 John 4:19). This goes back to Jesus himself (John 13:15) who calls on his disciples to follow his example.

9: The quotation is Psalm 18:49. See also 2 Samuel 22:50.

10: The quotation is Deuteronomy 32:43 (Septuagint).

11: The quotation is Psalm 117:1.

12: The quotation is a garbled version Isaiah 11:10 based on the Septuagint. See also Revelation 5:5.

The quoted passages originally stressed the recognition of the superiority of Israel's God by the heathen. Paul uses them to justify the invitation of Gentiles into the church.

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, {2} "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." {3} This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" {4} Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. {5} Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, {6} and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. {7} But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? {8} Bear fruit worthy of repentance. {9} Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. {10} Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. {11} "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. {12} His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

1. *in those days*: The phrase evokes the image of the last days, "that day," when God will restore the conditions of creation.

the wilderness: This, too, evokes the original conditions when "no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not yet caused it to rain...and there was no one to till the ground..." (Genesis 2:5). It also suggests feelings of disorder and chaos, of the threat of the unknown.

2. *repent*: "On an individual level repentance is a change of heart and a subsequent change in interpersonal behavior. Such a change in social behavior thus entailed the hope of transformation on the social level as well..." [4] "Although for Matthew (3:11) John's baptism is a sign of individual change, he does not state that the goal of this 'repentance' is 'the forgiveness of sins'—as do Mark and Luke. Perhaps he omits mentioning this so that Jesus' baptism would not imply that Jesus required forgiveness of sin. It is equally conceivable, however, that for Matthew the forgiveness of sin both implied and included the remittance of economic and social debts..." [5]

the kingdom of heaven: The kingdom of heaven (or of God, as frequently in Mark and Luke) is the rule of God as it is expressed in the ethical lives of those who live in it.

3: *The quotation is Isaiah 40:3 (Septuagint).*

This is the one of whom Isaiah the prophet spoke: The Baptizer is foretold in the Old Testament. *crying in the wilderness*: The wilderness may be taken figuratively as the wilderness of ignorance and willful sin which characterized the audience to which John was called as well as the wilderness *in* the boundaries of Judea.

4. John's appearance corresponds with that of an ascetic. In 11:14, 17:12 Matthew identifies John with Elijah. The leather belt recalls the description of Elijah in 2 Kings 1:8.5

5-7: A clear distinction is made between "the people of Jerusalem and all Judea" on the one hand and their leaders, "many Pharisees and Sadducees" on the other. Both came for baptism. However, only the former received it, the Pharisees and Sadducees received public

humiliation.

brood of vipers...Abraham. John attacks their ancestry. Not only are they described as "snake bastards," but they are forbidden the consolation of Abrahamic descent. Even stones can have Abrahamic descendents (verse 9). The distinction between the people and their leaders is removed in 27:25.

8-10. Bear fruit worthy of repentance: Although John's baptism was for repentance, it required confession and a life of repentance, a change of heart and a subsequent change in interpersonal behavior.

Even now: The last days are at hand—in verse 2 John's proclamation is that the kingdom of heaven has come near.

9. We have Abraham as our ancestor: See also John 8:33, 39; Romans 2:28-29.

11-12: The coming one will come with a winnowing fork, gathering the wheat into his granary, but burning the chaff with fire. The image of the separation of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46 has a similar thrust.

Holy Spirit and fire: one interpretation is that they are the same; the other is the eschatological interpretation that sees baptism in the Spirit as an earthly gift, with baptism in fire to be an experience of judgment. [6]

Reflection

The prayer is directed toward our preparation for the celebration of our Lord's first coming. We pray that his coming will strengthen us in our conflict with evil, and lighten our path through the darkness of the present world.

The first lesson promises a return to the primeval paradise for the people of Judah, who are ruled by a son of Jesse as a righteous judge.

The Psalmist prays that God will give the King those qualities of knowledge and righteousness and the fear of Yahweh that Isaiah foretold. "The song is undoubtedly pre-exilic and could be assigned to a relatively early time..." [7] so the Psalm is not a response to the exile. Righteousness, deliverance and prosperity are the blessing the Psalm implores.

The second lesson incorporates the Gentiles into the company of those who will enjoy the fulfillment of those promises. Within the context of the lections for this day the second lesson focuses our attention on the first lesson and the Psalm and the conditions of harmony and protection, of the knowledge of the Lord and peace which they promise to our generation.

The Gospel threatens those among the Chosen People who do not recognize or accept the one who is coming. The interpretive issues for us must be to determine who are the Pharisees and Sadducees in our communities (that is, who are those who claim to know God and yet fail to take seriously Jesus' new baptism of fire), and further, how to relate to the contemporary Jewish community. In general, the vision of the eschaton as peace, harmony, righteousness, the incorporation of the Gentiles envisioned by the other lessons is replaced here by a radical division of those who will be saved from those who will not. The difference is that in the Old Testament passages the distinction is implicit: Israel is Chosen, the Assyrians are not, and so on. In Acts Paul is anxious to justify the ongoing incorporation of Gentiles into the Church. For him the separation is between Christian Jews and Gentile Christians on one hand, and unbelievers, Jew or Gentile on the other.

Hymns [8]

Hymn suggestions are from *With One Voice* (e.g. 762v), *Hymnal Supplement 1991* (e.g.

725s) and LBW (e.g. 32).

E = Entrance; D = Hymn of the Day; I = First Lesson P = Psalm; II = Second Lesson; G = Gospel

<p>35 --E--Hark, the Glad 36 --D--On Jordan's Banks 29 --D--Comfort, Comfort 58 --I--Lo, How a Rose</p>	<p>626v --I--People Look East 762v --I--O Day of Peace 34 --II--Oh, Come, Oh, 493 --II--Hope of the</p>
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Prayers of the People [\[9\]](#)

P or A: All needs and joys are known to God. Let us bring to God those known to us and ask guidance to be part of the growth of God's grace in the world, saying, "O branch of the root of Jesse", and responding "Graft us to yourself."

A: There are many who need to hear the proclamation of your good news. May all those set apart for ordained ministry and all who have been baptized in your name, daily confess our faith in word and deed. O branch of the root of Jesse, Graft us to yourself.

A: We plead for the day when no one shall hurt or destroy on your holy mountain and ask your care for those who suffer injury and even death in our society at the hands of those who are stronger, especially for women. Strengthen us that we may work for their safety and the elimination of their fears. O branch of the root of Jesse, Graft us to yourself.

A: On this day commemorating St. Nicholas, may each child be cherished among us and all Sunday Schools, nurseries and children's care centers be places of safety and security. That we may all, children, youth and adults, be nourished in our faith. O branch of the root of Jesse, Graft us to yourself.

A: There are those who are sick or grieve among us. O God, grant us all the sufficient grace and trust to which you invite us in our baptism. O branch of the root of Jesse, Graft us to yourself.

A: For our growth in faith and maturity through the daily work we perform, that each task may become a way of honoring your name and giving you glory. O branch of the root of Jesse, Graft us to yourself.

P: For the words of your prophets and those of John the Baptist, which call us to repentance and trust in you alone, that you are here to listen to our prayers, through Jesus who came on behalf of your truth. Amen.

Or [\[10\]](#)

Presider or deacon

As we prepare the way of the Lord, let us offer prayers to God who will baptize us with Spirit and fire.

Deacon or other leader

For the coming of Jesus Christ in power and glory.

For the coming of Wisdom to teach and guide us.

For the coming of Emmanuel, the hope of all the peoples.

For the peace of the world, and for our unity in Christ.

For our bishop and all bishops, for the presbyters, for the deacons and all who minister in Christ, and for all the holy people of God.

For the church throughout the world and the faithful in every place.

For the leaders of the nations and all in authority.

For justice, peace, and freedom among peoples of the earth.

For travelers, for the sick and the suffering, for the hungry and the oppressed, and for those in prison.

For the dying and the dead.

For our deliverance from all affliction, strife, and need.

Joining our voices with the blessed Virgin Mary and with all the saints and angels of God, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

O Root of Jesse, who rises as a sign among all peoples, in whose presence rulers stand silent and nations bow in worship, come and deliver us without delay. Glory to you for ever.

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Notes

[1] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*. Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, p. 101.

[2] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. New York: Doubleday, 2000, p. 24.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

[4] Bruce Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 38.

[5] *Loc. cit.*

[6] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Commentary*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 171.

[7] Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989, p. 77.

[8] <http://www.worship.on.ca/text/rcla9899.txt>

[9] http://www.worship.on.ca/text/inter_a2.txt

[10] <http://members.cox.net/oplater/prayer.htm>