

December 9, 2007
Advent 2

"A Mighty Little Shoot from the Root of Jesse"

ISAIAH 11:1-10

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD-- ³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor 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 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

Have you ever taken notice of how the Lord uses things that are small and insignificant to perform mighty miracles? The Lord took dirt, ordinary dirt and dust similar to what I have in this jar. From that dust he forms man, a creature with such complex cells that the best minds in the world today stand in awe of what happens inside this little cell, especially its DNA coding. Five smooth stones from a brook found their way into the hand of David the shepherd boy. One of those stones is placed into a sling and hurled at a giant warrior. The hand of God took hold of that stone and hurled it with such force and accuracy the evil monster dropped to the ground. The Virgin Mary wraps her little baby in swaddling clothes and lays him in manger in Bethlehem. That tiny child is Lord from all eternity come into our world in human flesh, someone who can save you from your sin and give you eternal life.

The prophet Isaiah shows us how something small can become very significant for our lives today. He gives us the picture of a little shoot coming out of a stump that has been cut down. Have you ever seen a tree cut down, and a shoot growing from the cut off stump? The toyon berry tree on our property died. It used to have beautiful red berries. We cut it down. But now shoots are coming out of the cut off stump. Here is one of the shoots. Will some of them become even more beautiful than the original tree? Jesus was born into the tribe of Judah, from the root or lineage of Jesse, David's father. This once great nation was cut down like one the giant red wood trees along the California coast. From the old cut off stump Jesus was born. This morning we want to look at this mighty little shoot that grew from the root of Jesse, first to see how beautiful it is and then to see the blessings it brings us.

What beauty we see in Jesus

What beauty we see in Jesus, that little shoot that comes from the root of Jesse. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." Notice how the word "Branch" is capitalized. One of the names for Jesus in the Bible is "The Branch." We just sang about this in the hymn, "Behold a Branch Is Growing." The word for branch in the Hebrew is "nazar" from which we get the name "Nazareth." Nazareth was a "little shoot" town, a twig town, today we would say a "hick" town. Isaiah 53 says of Jesus that "he grew up before him as a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty of majesty to attract us to him." Even one of Jesus' disciples said at first, "What good thing can come out of Nazareth?"

This Advent and Christmas season provides us with another opportunity to focus on Jesus' humble origins and humble birth. The gospel of Luke captures this humble birth with words, "She gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger." 2 Corinthians says, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that through his poverty you might become rich."

When Mary held the tiny baby Jesus in her arms, and nursed him at her breasts and bathed him, and changed his diapers, she believed with all her heart that she was holding more than a child born into great poverty. She believed she was holding Jesus, her Lord and God, the Savior of the world, Christ the Lord.

Isaiah speaks about the amazing beauty of this Branch that was of such humble origin. "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord- and he will delight in the fear of the Lord." No one has greater wisdom and understanding of your particular circumstances in life than Jesus. As the old spiritual says, "Nobody knows the trouble I've seen, Nobody knows but Jesus."

This humble branch is even more beautiful because he has the Spirit of counsel and power. Not only does he want to help you with your needs, he has the power to help you. He has the Spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord. He delights in obeying his heavenly Father. He knew what to do in every situation and pleased his heavenly Father. He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, "My Father if it is possible take this cup from me, not my will but yours be done." That is why the Father said of the beautiful life Jesus lived, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." As we sing in the carol, "Behold a branch is growing Of loveliest form and grace." The beauty of this Christmas season points to the permanent lasting beauty that we see in Jesus our Savior.

All this beauty that we see in Jesus, this mighty little shoot from the root of Jesse, would have very little meaning for us if we could not enjoy this beauty as our very own personal blessing. That is why we love hearing the prophet Isaiah tell us in Isaiah 9:6 "Unto us a child is born, unto us Son is given..." We listen to the angels announce to the shepherds, "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." The custom of giving gifts at Christmas reflects the love of God that gave us the blessing of his Son Jesus.

What blessings we see in Jesus

This mighty little branch from the root of Jesse gives you blessings you can find in no other place. Isaiah tell us that the Messiah Jesus will "not judge by what he sees, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth." Jesus is such a blessing to us because he does not judge the way human beings judge. He does not judge by what he sees or what he hears. Instead he judges people by his own standards of righteousness and holiness.

Our country prides itself in having a good system of judging the water we drink, the food we eat and even the toys we give our children. In China they do not have the same standards we have. Toys are produced with lead paint, and shrimp are raised in polluted water. Jesus does not look on the outward appearance. He is able to judge people by what he sees in their hearts as he compares it to his own standard of righteousness. Psalm 139 says, "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me...You are familiar with all my ways." Don't you want Jesus to come into your life, point out the problems of sin that you are covering, root them out, pay for them and help you get rid of them?

Have you ever heard the poem, "If Jesus Came to Your House?" Let me read it to you? "If Jesus came to your house to spend a day or two, if He came unexpectedly, I wonder what you'd do? Oh, I know you'd give your nicest room to such an honored guest, and all the food you'd serve to Him would be the very best. And you would keep assuring Him you're glad to have him there, That serving Him in your home is joy beyond compare. But when you saw Him coming, would you meet Him at the door, with arms outstretched to welcome in your heavenly visitor? Or would you have to change your clothes before you let Him in, or hide some magazines and put the Bible where they'd been? Would you turn off the radio and hope He hadn't heard, and wished you hadn't uttered that last loud nasty word. Would you hide your worldly music and put some hymn books out? Could you let Jesus come right in, or would you rush about? Oh, I wonder if the Savior came to spend a day with you, would you just go on doing all the things you always do? Would you go right on saying the things you always say? Would life for you continue as it does now day to day? Would our family conversation keep up it's usual pace, or would you find it hard each meal to say a table grace?

Would you sing the songs you always sing and read the books you read, and let Him know on which the things your mind and spirit feeds? Would you take Jesus with you everywhere you planned to go, or would you maybe change your plans, for just a day or so? Would you be glad to have Him meet with all your closest friends, or would you hope they'd stay away until His visit ends? Would you be glad to have Him stay forever on and on, or would you sigh with great relief when He at last was gone? It might be interesting to know the things that you would do, if Jesus came in person to spend the day with you!"

If Jesus came to your house, what would you do? Immediately we would feel the crushing weight of our sin, our grumbling and complaining, our bad thoughts about other people, our selfishness and self-centeredness. The Jesus who judges us by his very presence in our lives is the same Jesus of whom Isaiah says, "Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. So faithful is our Jesus that he took all the sin that he sees in our live and places it upon himself. He will cry out with a loud voice of judgment, "It is finished!" "I have paid the price for the sin of the world. You are not guilty." Such is the love in Jesus. He who judges us unfit and guilty, also make us fit by declaring us not guilty.

In Jesus you have a peace this world cannot give. It is pictured in Isaiah as a wolf living with the lamb, a cow feeding with the bear, and the lion eating straw like an ox, and a child playing near the hole of cobra. It is pictured as a perfect world where they will not destroy or hurt on my holy mountain. It is seen as a place where the earth is full of the knowledge of the Lord. Some would say that this is going to happen in some future kingdom that Jesus will build here on this earth. But then we listen to the voice of John the Baptism crying out in the desert, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near." We realize that Jesus kingdom is with us right now. He comes as a king into your life and mine. He opens our eyes to see his unfailing love for us. He makes these blessings so real to us. You can never, ever exhaust the peace and comfort found in this one verse of the Bible, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." This is a peace this world cannot give. It is a peace we have with us right now as the angels announced, "Peace on earth..."

The time is coming, and the time is here right now, when people from all over the world are going to come to this rest that Jesus the mighty little shoot from the root of Jesse has to offer. "In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples, the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious." Every Christmas tree, every ornament, every light, every candle, every gift under the tree, stands as a powerful banner raised up inviting people to come to Jesus. In that little baby born in Bethlehem our God has done mighty things for us. Big things come in little packages. Nowhere is it more true than in Jesus. We have a mighty little shoot from the root of Jesse. Amen.