

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Isaiah = I-ZAY-uh

Jesse = JES-ee

The tone of this potent reading is hopeful.

Though not emphasized rhythmically, note how often “shall” is used in this reading. Let this word—and the hopeful, future tense in which it is set—guide your proclamation.

The images of animals help to focus the reading, making it vivid.

LECTIONARY #4

READING I Isaiah 11:1–10

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

On **that** day, a **shoot** shall sprout from the **stump** of **Jesse**,
and from his **roots** a **bud** shall **blossom**.

The **spirit** of the **LORD** shall rest **upon** him:

a spirit of **wisdom** and of **understanding**,
a spirit of **counsel** and of **strength**,
a spirit of **knowledge** and of **fear** of the **LORD**,
and his **delight** shall be the **fear** of the **LORD**.

Not by **appearance** shall he **judge**,

nor by **hearsay** shall he **decide**,
but he shall **judge** the **poor** with **justice**,
and **decide** **aright** for the **land’s afflicted**.

He shall **strike** the **ruthless** with the **rod** of his **mouth**,
and with the **breath** of his **lips** he shall **slay** the **wicked**.

Justice shall be the **band** around his **waist**,
and **faithfulness** a **belt** upon his **hips**.

Then the **wolf** shall be a **guest** of the **lamb**,
and the **leopard** shall lie **down** with the **kid**;
the **calf** and the young **lion** shall browse **together**,
with a little **child** to **guide** them.

READING I

Ancient Israelite theology bases the coming of the messiah upon three events. First, the anointed one will come from the line of David. Second, this righteous king will establish justice in the land. Finally, all of creation will be restored to the peace found in the original garden of Eden. In essence, the messianic age will see the establishment of right relationship on earth: right relationship among humans, between humans and God, and within the entire sweep of living things. All creatures will live in the harmony God intended for

his creation when he spoke his word and brought life into being.

“The stump of Jesse” that Isaiah refers to in the opening line reveals the present state of the ruling institution in Israel. For too many generations, Israel has known corrupt and self-seeking kings who have proven themselves unfaithful. But God promises to renew this kingship by sending his Spirit, who will inspire right judgment (counsel, strength, knowledge) and will ensure the king’s proper reverence of God (fear of the Lord).

Unlike the wicked and unfaithful kings of recent generations, the spirit-filled king will execute justice throughout the land. This leader will act swiftly to overturn past sins. The poor and the afflicted will receive special attention, while the ruthless and the wicked shall be struck down. This is a king who will not have to use the sword to punish the unjust; rather, his words alone will restore justice. His entire strength will come from his worldview of justice and faithfulness.

Emphasis on "no harm."

Gentiles = JEN-fils

Don't overdo the emphasis on "glorious."

For meditation and context:

TO KEEP IN MIND

Read the Scripture passage and its commentary in Workbook. Then read it from your Bible, including what comes before and after it, so that you understand the context.

The **cow** and the **bear** shall be **neighbors**,
together their young shall **rest**;
the **lion** shall eat **hay** like the **ox**.
The **baby** shall **play** by the **cobra's den**,
and the **child** lay his **hand** on the **adder's lair**.
There shall be **no harm** or **ruin** on **all** my holy **mountain**;
for the **earth** shall be **filled** with **knowledge** of the **LORD**,
as **water** covers the **sea**.
On **that day**, the root of **Jesse**,
set **up** as a **signal** for the **nations**,
the **Gentiles** shall seek **out**,
for his **dwelling** shall be **glorious**.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17 (7)

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever.

O God, with your judgment endow the king,
and with your justice, the king's son;
he shall govern your people with justice
and your afflicted ones with judgment.

Justice shall flower in his days,
and profound peace, till the moon
be no more.

May he rule from sea to sea,
and from the River to the ends
of the earth.

For he shall rescue the poor when
he cries out,
and the afflicted when he has no one
to help him.

He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor;
the lives of the poor he shall save.

May his name be blessed forever;
as long as the sun his name shall remain.

In him shall all the tribes of the earth
be blessed;
all the nations shall proclaim
his happiness.

Finally, this chosen envoy of God will not only restore right relationship within Judea, but he will end wars and discord among every faction on earth. No more will the world be guided by fear of others and by predatory relationships. The curse brought about by the serpent's sin in the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:19) will come to an end as "the calf and the young lion shall browse together." The kingdom of God is founded upon a just order in which no creature competes with another for survival. Instead of functioning according to competition, God's kingdom manifests itself in

selfless cooperation. The passage ends with the reminder that "the root of Jesse," this just king, will be a sign for all the nations; God's kingdom of right relationship is to extend through all the world.

READING II

Chapter 15 of Paul's Letter to the Romans aims at replacing dissension within the community with an attitude of harmony. He speaks not merely of Christlike hospitality but of the way of mercy. The problem the Roman community faces is the divide between the circumcised and the uncircumcised and

the debate as to whether or not circumcision is necessary to become a follower of Christ. This was a community composed of both Jewish and Gentile members. How were they to follow the Christian way with different ethnic practices?

For Paul, the answer lies in "endurance" and through "the encouragement of the Scriptures." The Word of God is filled with examples of divine patience, and it is only fitting that communities discover hope in this Word. Paul suggests that fidelity to the Word will yield a sense of true unity by which the community thinks in harmony

The tone of this reading is hopeful.

"May" indicates that Paul is making a petition.

"Welcome" redirects the hope to Paul's audience.

circumcised = SER-kuhm-sīz*d

patriarchs = PAY-tree-ahrks

Gentiles = JEN-tīls

Scripture's authority emphasizes the hope.

Judea = joo-DEE-uh or joo-DAY-uh

A very vivid story is told in this Gospel reading.

Isaiah = Ī-ZAY-uh

and speaks with one voice. It is this harmony that makes for true worship; God's name cannot be glorified if people's hearts are torn apart in discord.

The final portion of this passage alludes to the core problem that separates the community in Rome, namely the status of those members who have not been baptized. Paul suggests that a spirit of welcome is necessary in order to overcome such a division. Furthermore, he writes that Christ came to those who were already circumcised as a sign of God's fidelity to the people of the covenant, but he also has a

READING II Romans 15:4–9

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

Whatever was written **previously** was written

for our **instruction**,

that by **endurance** and by the **encouragement** of the **Scriptures** we **might** have **hope**.

May the **God** of **endurance** and **encouragement**

grant you to **think** in **harmony** with one **another**,

in **keeping** with **Christ Jesus**,

that with **one accord** you may with **one voice**

glorify the **God** and **Father** of our **Lord Jesus Christ**.

Welcome one another, then, as **Christ** welcomed you, for the **glory** of **God**.

For I say that **Christ** became a **minister** of the **circumcised**

to show God's **truthfulness**,

to **confirm** the **promises** of the **patriarchs**,

but so that the **Gentiles** might glorify **God** for his **mercy**.

As it is **written**:

Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name.

GOSPEL Matthew 3:1–12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

John the Baptist appeared, **preaching** in the desert of **Judea** and **saying**, "**Repent**, for the **kingdom** of **heaven** is at **hand**!"

It was of **him** that the prophet **Isaiah** had spoken when he **said**:

A voice of one crying out in the desert,

Prepare the way of the Lord,

make straight his paths.

plan to include the Gentiles according to his gift of mercy. What Paul is saying here is that the Romans, and in fact all of the Gentiles, are not an afterthought in God's mighty plan of salvation but are very much part of the reason for which God sent his Son into the world. Thus, Paul cites Psalm 18:50 as proof: "I will praise you among the Gentiles / and sing praises to your name."

GOSPEL In the layout of Matthew's Gospel, the figure of John the Baptist serves as a bridge between the infancy narrative and the inauguration of

Jesus' public ministry. While it is clear that John's ministry was one of calling Israel to repentance and to a baptism that would mark their restored allegiance to God and the coming of the kingdom of heaven, at some point, John became acutely aware that his cousin, Jesus, would play a particularly important role in heralding God's plan of salvation. In other words, while John's preaching did not initially point to Jesus, he became convinced that Jesus is God's revelation.

No matter when John came to believe in the power of Jesus' ministry, it is clear

Slight pause between "belt" and "around."

Slight pause between "time" and "Jerusalem."

Pharisees = FAYR-uh-seez
Sadducees = SAD-yoo-seez
Emphasis on "brood" and "vipers."

Emphasis on the pronouns as this reading concludes, especially as John the Baptist switches from first to third person.

Slight pause between "up" and "children."

Emphasis on the pronouns as this reading concludes, especially as John the Baptist switches from first to third person.

**John wore clothing made of camel's hair
and had a leather belt around his waist.
His food was locusts and wild honey.
At that time Jerusalem, all Judea,
and the whole region around the Jordan
were going out to him
and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River
as they acknowledged their sins.**

When he saw **many** of the **Pharisees** and **Sadducees**
coming to his **baptism**, he said to them, "**You brood** of **vipers!**
Who warned you to **flee** from the **coming wrath?**
Produce good fruit as **evidence** of your **repentance.**
And do not **presume** to say to **yourselves**,
'We have **Abraham** as our **father.**'

For I **tell** you,
God can **raise up children** to **Abraham** from these **stones.**
Even now the **ax** lies at the **root** of the **trees.**
Therefore every **tree** that does not bear **good fruit**
will be cut **down** and **thrown** into the **fire.**
I am baptizing you with **water**, for **repentance**,
but the **one** who is coming **after** me is **mightier** than **I.**
I am not **worthy** to **carry** his **sandals.**
He will baptize you with the **Holy Spirit** and **fire.**
His **winnowing fan** is in his **hand.**
He will **clear** his **threshing floor**
and **gather** his **wheat** into his **barn**,
but the **chaff** he will **burn** with **unquenchable fire.**"

that Matthew wishes to cast John in the role of a subordinate. It is likely that Matthew wants the reader to see John as a radical outlier—He wears camel hair clothing and eats wild locusts as his diet. Thus, while John the Baptist is the precursor of the Lord, there ought to be no mistake that John is to remain always in the shadow of Jesus.

Interestingly, John attacks two major power players that will later criticize the actions of Jesus, namely the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees are best known as strict keepers of the Mosaic law,

while the Sadducees represented the priestly class and thus the work of the Temple. Here, in the context of his summoning an attitude of repentance on the part of the people, John uses them as examples of hypocrisy that will surely not give way to the conversion he is calling for. John suggests that even if they are unable to be transformed by the authority of his preaching and ministry of baptism, then they ought to prepare for the power and authority they will face in the one who is to come after him. Thus, the role that John the Baptist plays of bridging the birth of Jesus

with his ministry is not simply one of a polite introduction, but rather, his words leave no doubt that the words and work of Jesus will be nothing like the world has ever seen before. Jesus baptizing "with the Holy Spirit and fire" and his figurative clearing of the threshing floor will serve to transform all opposed to the coming of God's kingdom. S.W.