

Isaiah 11:1-10

This Advent text is a very **special** one. It's one of the **Gospel gems** scattered around in the Book of Isaiah. There are 66 chapters in the Book of Isaiah, and the first 39 of those chapters are heavily weighted with a preaching of the **law** - and **rightly** so. The time of Isaiah (ca 700-750 BC) was a time of general **apostasy** in the Northern Kingdom. Concerning the people of Isaiah's time, the Book of Kings tells us, "*They did not **listen**. They made their necks just as **stiff** as their fathers, who did not trust in the LORD their God. They rejected His **regulations**, and the **covenant** which He made with their fathers, and the **testimony** with which He warned them. They followed useless **idols**, and they became **useless** themselves ... They **deserted** all the commands of the LORD their God ... They made their sons and daughters pass through the **fire**. They engaged in **divination** and sought **omens** and **sold** themselves to do **evil** in the eyes of the LORD.*" Isaiah foretold the **fall** of the Northern Kingdom at the hand of the cruel **Assyrians**, and he lived to see that prophecy **fulfilled** in 722 BC, when the Assyrian army destroyed their capital city, **Samaria**, and **deported** the people of the Northern Kingdom to **Assyria**.

Many of the same sinful conditions which led to the fall of the **Northern** Kingdom, were also present in **Judah**, the **Southern** Kingdom. Isaiah also foretold **their** fall, but it was not to come for another **150 years**. Now, in the midst of all this preaching of **law** and **judgment**, we find God's beautiful promise of **The Coming Of The Branch**. This is the **same** Branch of whom Jeremiah spoke in his prophecy. Jeremiah wrote, "*In those days and at that time, I will cause a **righteous Branch** to grow up from David's line. He will establish **justice** and **righteousness** on earth. In those days Judah will be **saved**, and Jerusalem will dwell **securely**. This is what she (that is, Jerusalem) will be called: **The LORD Our Righteousness**.*" As we consider the **arrival** of this Righteous Branch, we will see that the Branch will come from a **stump** - He will come with the Spirit of the **LORD** - and He will come as a **banner** for the people.

Our text begins, "*A **shoot** will spring up from the **stump** of Jesse; and a **Branch** from his **roots** will bear fruit.*" As I already said, the **Northern** Kingdom of **Israel** had been destroyed in 722 BC. Although Judah still **remained**, it was spiritually **weak**, and it was politically on its **last leg**. Judah had become a **tributary** of powerful Assyria. That meant that as long as they didn't **make** any trouble, they wouldn't **get** any trouble. However, King Hezekiah decided to stir things up a little bit. He **stopped** making tribute payments to Assyria, and the result was **disastrous**. In 701 BC, Assyria **devastated** the land of Judah right up to the gates of **Jerusalem**. But Jerusalem **itself** did **not** fall - not **yet**.

About 100 years later, **Zedekiah** was king in Judah. He would be the **last** one. Zedekiah saw Jerusalem **fall**, and then witnessed the **murder** of his two **sons**. After that, the **new** world rulers - the **Babylonians** - put out his **eyes**, and carried him off in **chains**, to **die** in Babylon. The family of **David** - the royal house of **Judah**, which had once been **stately** and **majestic** like a mighty **oak** tree - had now been **cut down**. Only a **stump** remained.

Nevertheless, we know that a tree is made up of **more** than just a trunk, and branches, and leaves. In fact, there is as much tree **below** the ground in its complicated **root** system, as there is **above** the ground. It was from these **roots**, that a **shoot** would come up. It would be **small**, **weak**, and **tender** at first - just a **little** twig, which could easily be **broken off**. But it would grow into a **Branch** - a Branch which would bear much **fruit**.

By **comparison**, in the previous chapter of Isaiah's prophecy, the **enemies** of God's Church are referred to as **boughs** - tall and lofty **trees**. However, in spite of their great **stature**, they will be **lopped off**, and brought **low**. The Spirit of God would shower **His gifts** upon the **Branch**, to make it **stronger** than God's **enemies**. Isaiah writes, "*The Spirit of the LORD will 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. He will be delighted with the fear of the LORD.*" This Spirit was very **evident** in our Lord Jesus. John the Baptist testified that he knew Jesus was the Son of God, when he saw the **Holy Spirit** come down and **remain** on Him. He also said, "*The one who God has sent speaks God's words, for God gives the Spirit without measure.*"

When Jesus finds an abundance of the Holy Spirit in **others** as well, He is very **happy**. I think it's especially significant that the Hebrew word which is translated "*He will be delighted*" is closely connected with the sense of **smell**! Actually, that's not as **strange** as it might sound. Think of how pleasing a good **perfume** or **after shave** can be - or better yet, think of the aroma of **bacon**, **eggs**, **toast**, and **coffee** as you wake up on a crisp winter's morning - or maybe the scent of warm **apple** or pumpkin **pie** - or possibly the smell of freshly baked **bread** or Christmas **cookies**. Just the thought of those smells makes me **smile**. And the sense of smell brings pleasure to **Jesus** too. He is able to **sniff out** the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of **believers** wherever they are to be found - and He takes great **delight** in them.

The reason for the great abundance of the working of the Spirit in **Jesus**, was to bring **righteousness** and **peace**. Our text continues, "*He will not judge by what*

*He sees with His eyes, nor will he render decisions based on what He hears with His ears, but with **righteousness** He will judge the poor, and He will render **fair** decisions in favor of the oppressed on the earth.*” As a **judge** Jesus will be **righteous**. His judgments will be quite **different** from the judgments of **men**, because Jesus does **not** judge by **outward** words or actions. Rather, He looks into the **heart** of the sinner, to see if there is saving **faith** inside. And where there **is**, Jesus showers them with His **righteousness**.

Jesus also does **not** fit the **traditional** role of a peace-bringer. Isaiah writes, *“The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, the calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together, and a little **Child** will lead them.”* There are very few instances where a little **child** can be trusted even with a **tame** animal. Invariably they will get into some kind of **trouble** for trying to **ride** the dog, or **pull** the cat’s tail. Perhaps some of you remember seeing a television commercial where two women were talking about how great a particular kind of laundry detergent happened to be. And right in the middle of their conversation a little boy - messy from head to toe - breaks in and innocently asks his mother, *“Will it get purple paint off the puppy?”* Yet, the little child in our **text** - the Babe of Bethlehem - is **different** - **very** different. He is pictured as leading even **wild** animals in perfect safety, and without fear. Jesus is a **remarkable** peace-bringer.

And finally, Isaiah tells us, *“This is what will take place on that day. The peoples will seek the **Root** of Jesse, who will be standing like a **banner** for the peoples, and His resting place will be **glorious**.”* No longer will the Root of Jesse remain **hidden** and **invisible** and **unnoticed** underground, but He will be lifted **high** like a **banner** for all to see - lifted high as a **rallying** point for all the people. Certainly the most **obvious** and the most **significant** application of these words for us, is when Jesus, the Branch, was lifted up on the **cross** to suffer and die to **redeem** us from our sins. This **incomparable** act of love, draws us back again and again, to **rally** together at the foot of the **cross**. There we may leave our sins **behind**, and continue our lives under God’s **grace** and **forgiveness**.

This is the **Branch** whose coming on Christmas Day we are anxiously awaiting once again. Although His beginnings were **humble** - like a fragile **shoot** - nevertheless, armed with the gifts of the **Holy Spirit**, Jesus brings us **righteousness** and **peace**. Since we know that, let’s **rally** around the Lord Jesus. Let’s make Him the **Banner** that we hold up for all the world to see. Jesus has worked hard to carry out His Father’s will, and has **earned** a glorious resting place in heaven - both for **Himself**, and for **us**. So, let’s thank God for sending this **Branch** to be our **Savior**. Amen.