

## Second Sunday in Advent

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 11:1-10

*The Righteous Reign of the Branch*

**There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. 2 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. 3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, 4 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. 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. 6 The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf 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 cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. 9 They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. 10 In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.**

**11:1-16** THIS chapter does not cohere with the preceding ones, as it seems, since it treats of a different subject. But the ability to recognize the coherence of the prophets is important. For the prophets did not speak as drunk and raving men, mixing diverse subjects together. But the Holy Spirit is the best rhetorician and logician, and therefore He speaks most clearly. The first item discussed here is the promise of the spiritual kingdom, which most aptly follows the prophecy concerning the deliverance of the kingdom of Judah and the restoration of external peace, seeing that this promise speaks of a far nobler deliverance, one that is spiritual. This is the way the prophets usually contemplate the connection between the earthly and the spiritual kingdom, as we do too when in our preaching we speak now of faith, now of sight. For this is a proper order, and therefore the prophets, proclaiming either threats or promises with reference to the bodily kingdom, in the second place keep the people of the earthly kingdom in a state of expectation for the coming spiritual kingdom. First comes what is physical, and then what is spiritual. Therefore Isaiah says significantly: *There shall come forth*, as if to say: “This is not the only thing to come true; *There shall come forth*, that is, a nobler deliverance will follow.” But he is speaking about Christ, not about Hezekiah, as the Jews quibble. (Luther)

How the prophecy that begins here ties in with the preceding section will be clear once when have examined the contents of chapter 11. What the prophet had to say about Assyrian has all been said. The discourse begins as from anew. Isaiah speaks now about a future David, who should arise from the family of Jesse. In the spirit he sees the house of Jesus or David, but in humble, miserable circumstances. Before this the house and family of David, especially in the days of David and Solomon, resembled a mighty proud tree. But now, at the time the prophet has in view, the mighty trunk with its limbs and its top has been hewn down. There remains only a stump “geza” a rootstock, “sharahiyim.” The house of David returned to its humble beginnings. Yet look, out of this stump and rootstock comes forth a shoot, a fresh, green branch. That a weathered tree stump, which possesses no more life and no more vitality, nevertheless, drives forth a living branch occurs contrary to the course of nature. It is a miracle of God. (Stoekhardt)

These are pictures of life rising from death and destruction. (TLSB)

**11:1 shoot . . . stump.** The Assyrians all but destroyed Judah, but it was the Babylonian exile that brought the kingdom of Judah to an end in 586 B.C. The Messiah will grow as a shoot from that stump of David's dynasty. (CSB)

The coming Messiah. Luther: "This is what he called Christ, and such is the beginning of the rising spiritual kingdom. It is obviously different from that of an earthly kingdom, where an assembly of people is provided with a king. In this case the King is born first, and then He gathers a people for Himself. At first there will be a single Sprout risen out of the root, from the old and hopeless trunk, which is nevertheless watered with a divine strength" (AE 16:117). (TLSB)

That by this stem of Jesse's family Christ, the son of David, is meant rabbis have even acknowledged. The sprout which contrary to the course of nature comes forth from the dead rootstock is obviously none other than the Branch of the Lord, (4:2) than he will contrary to the laws of nature should in a miraculous manner be conceived and born of the Virgin Mary. (7;14) It was prophesied in chapter seven that Christ, the virgin's son, born amid the misery of his people, would partake of the misery and poverty of his people. So it is stated here that he would come forth from the poor, down-at-the heels family of David. He comes forth from humble beginnings and goes about earth in poverty and contempt. "He shall grow up a for him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground: he hath no form more, holiness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him." (Is. 53:2) (Stoeckhardt)

This prophecy has literally then fulfilled. Christ was born of a virgin, of a poor daughter of David, betrothed to a poor man from the house of David, in deep poverty and humility. In quiet solitude the Child grew up in Nazareth. But while he walked on earth he was and remained a Nazoraios, (Matt. 2:23), a "netser", a despised, inconspicuous Branch, from whom men looked away, of whom men were not fond. But the prophet immediately adds that this Shoot will bear fruit. It grows into a trunk, acquires branches, grows to become a mighty tree, and bears fruit. Upon Christ's state of humiliation follows the state of exultation and the kingly glory. It is precisely the bringing forth of fruit that is mentioned. These fruits are the Messiah's disciples, the children the Lord gives him. (Is. 8:16-18) In 53:10 Isaiah says of that Shoot that it will have a seed. Elsewhere in prophecy those who serve Christ the King also appear as his children. To the priest-king Melchizedek will be born children as do in the morning. These children, or of him, constitute the people who willingly follow him. (Ps. 110:3) soul Christ says in the New Testament that the kernel of wheat, after it has died, will bring forth much fruit. (John 12:24) "and I, if I'd be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." (John 12:32). The believers, who called Jesus Christ their Lord, are born of him, are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones, have the nature of Christ, are one spirit with the Lord. (Stoeckhardt)

*Jesse.* David's father (see 1Sa 16:10-13). (CSB)

Assyrians were cut down like a tree (10:-33-34). Now, Isaiah sees what was to happen several decades later. The acts of the kind judgment would cut down the kingdom of David, the son of Jesse. The use of "Jesse" rather than "David" it here and in verse 10 indicates that this new king is not only of the lineage of David, but indeed a new David (Jer. 30:9; Ezk. 34:23-24; Hos. 3:5). This promise of a Messiah is fulfilled in Jesus (Mt. 1:6, 17; Lk. 2:4; Ac. 13:22-23). (TLSB).

*Branch.* This designates a human king in Daniel 11:7. Isaiah the holds king, from David's line, whose rule will affect human history to the end of time. This Son of David it is greater than Solomon and all Kings of human origin (Mt. 12:42). He is the promised Messiah. (TLSB)

Better: a "Shoot," נִצָּן, will bear fruit from his root. This is what he called Christ, and such is the beginning of the rising spiritual kingdom. It is obviously different from that of an earthly kingdom, where

an assembly of people is provided with a king. In this case the King is born first, and then He gathers a people for Himself. At first there will be a single Sprout risen out of the root, from the old and hopeless trunk, which is nevertheless watered with a divine strength. *The stump of Jesse* is the family of David. To him the promise was made in Ps. 132:11: "One of the sons of your body." To this promise the prophet refers here, and he points to the time in which the spiritual kingdom is to have its beginning, namely, when the stump of David will be regarded as lost, so that nothing is less hoped for than that a shoot should sprout up from the root. He says it will not come as long as the kingdom of Judah still continues to stand and is in flower, just as Jacob had said long before this in Gen. 49:10: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, etc." The stem of Judah had already shriveled up when the Maccabees and the priests ruled. Then the Romans obtained the rule and set up Herod there as king. If these matters are to be applied to all times, it is certainly thus, that God does not help except in the greatest trouble and in the utmost need. He is, Ps. 9:9 says, "a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble," so that it may be evident that the matter is managed by the hand of God, not by the plans of men. This is the Christian thing to do, to recognize the acceptable time and the day of salvation (cf. 2 Cor. 6:2), even when it seems to be a day of despair. From a trunk nearly decayed a little Twig will emerge and grow up and make holy, and it will not be prevented by heat or by rain or by all the powers of the air. (Luther)

How beautifully Isaiah pictures the coming Messiah. Even the Targum (ancient Jewish commentaries) applies this passage to the Messiah. When the Branch appeared in time, He was born in Bethlehem, the hometown of Jesse and David. Although Mary and Joseph were both descendants of King David, Jesus was born not in a palace but in a stable. The Romans occupied Palestine. No descendant of David ruled Judah at the time, only Herod, who was half Arabian. Mary was a humble woman from Nazareth engaged to Joseph, a carpenter. Little Nazareth was not highly regarded in Judea; massive Jerusalem was the important city. When Philip told Nathanael that the Messiah was "Jesus of Nazareth." Nathanael's reaction was, "Can anything good come from there?" (John 1:46). Clearly, the royal line of David was a dead stump without power, influence, or wealth. (PBC)

*shall bear fruit* – The coming messiah will fully be what god desires and willfully do what god desires (cf. Jn 15:5). (TLSB)

**11:2-3** All three persons of the Trinity are referenced here. "God the Father has given His Spirit to Christ, His beloved son, according to the received humanity. (Because of this He is called also Messiah i.e., The Anointed.) He has not received His gifts with limits as other saints. For on Christ the Lord, according to His received human nature rest the Spirit of wisdom and understanding" (FC SD VIII 72). (TLSB)

**11:2** *The Spirit ... will rest on him.* The Messiah, like David (1Sa 16:13), will be empowered by the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

The Spirit of the Lord rested upon Saul and David when God chose them to rule His people ( 1 Sm.10:10; 16:13). There will be no end to the flow of the spirits gifts equipping great David's greater Son, the Savior, with every trait and ability to make him a perfect ruler (42:1; 61:1-3; Acts 10:38). Ambrose: "Let it not trouble you that either here it is said, 'rivers,' or elsewhere 'seven Spirits,' for by the sanctification of these seven gifts of the Spirit, as Isaiah said, is signified in the fullness of all virtue... One, then is the River, but many the channels of the gifts of the Spirit. This River, then goes forth from the Fount of Life (NPNF 2 10:114). Gregory of Nazianzus: "Seven precious spirits are named; for I think Isaiah loves to call the activities of the Spirit spirits" (NPNF 2 7:379). Cyril of Jerusalem: "the Spirit is one in undivided, but His operations various... Though the titles of the Holy Ghost be different, He is one and the same; living and subsisting, and always present together with the Father and the Son" (NPNF 2 7:123, 125) (TLSB).

Now the prophet describes the forces, weapons, and gear of that King and His kingdom. It is a truly remarkable arsenal. Accordingly, this kingdom will be powerful in goodness and joy, not in weapons, and the protection of the Holy Spirit, who was given to Christ without measure, is certainly strong enough. Read Is. 61:1; John 1:16; Col. 2:9; John 7:16 ff. And here it is plainly indicated that that kingdom will not be physical but spiritual. In that kingdom all affairs will be conducted by the Spirit alone, and the Spirit will be poured out over the whole kingdom. (Luther)

The Spirit of the Lord settles down upon the Son of David and so rests upon Him. Because of the guttural in “alayn” the accent is on the last syllable in “wenahah.” The expression calls to mind the similar statement of John the Baptist, that He saw the Spirit descending and resting upon Jesus. John 1:32. Christ is Emmanuel, God in human flesh, the mighty God. But the Spirit of God permeates and has complete control also of His human nature, of His human life and activity from the very first. The humble, despised Branch is anointed beyond measure by the Spirit of God. (Stoeckhardt)

*wisdom* – This pertains to the control and conduct of all affairs. But it is a wisdom hidden in a mystery as it is called in 1 Cor. 2:7. The philosophers define wisdom as the understanding of divine matters, how each one should conduct himself before God, namely, that he should know that the Father is gracious, the Son was incarnate by Himself and suffered, how alone he may be justified and saved. It is the Holy Spirit who bestows this wisdom. (Luther)

This inquires into the essence of things, also into the depths of the Godhead. (Stoeckhardt)

*understanding* – Which some interpret as judgment and assistance against cunning and hindrances. But this pertains to wisdom. For the fool does not regard or consider what will be harmful. Dan. 11:37 says: “He will give no attention to women.” Wisdom is therefore an ingenuous and open acknowledgment of Christ, but understanding is the care and concerned endeavor to keep this wisdom unimpaired, so that a person may beware of Satan’s cunning. Paul writes in Titus 1:9: “... so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it.” This is understanding. Many have wisdom indeed, but they lack understanding, and this lack perverts the wisdom they do have. Christ is the giver of the Spirit. (Luther)

This manifests the heavenly, divine wisdom to men and shows them what is good and evil. (Stoeckhardt)

*counsel ... might*. The Spirit will endow him with the wisdom to undertake wise purposes and with the power to carry them out (see note on 9:6). (CSB)

So that a person may be able to give good counsel, especially in the time of trouble and the cross, which soon follows the wisdom and understanding given by Christ. Then the Spirit of counsel is needed to provide courage for bearing the tribulations. Ps. 16:7 says: “I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.” In the night of affliction counsel is effective. This also applies to the teachers, so that they may teach, admonish, and lift up the despairing. This is the Spirit of Christ, the Paraclete, the Comforter, and the Advocate. (Luther)

That is, the forces of power and victory in that counsel, so that comfort may cling in the stricken soul and be triumphant. For the best counsel is indeed given to many, but strength does not follow, comfort does not cling and does not act in the soul. Such people despair, but he who listens to his brother comforting him then by the Word of God and obeys and accepts the Word, forsaking all vain thoughts and speculations, such a one will be saved. To him is added the Spirit of might, and these two brothers are a strong city against Satan. Here Christ is present. (Luther)

The Spirit of counsel and might points back to the double name given the Messiah: Counselor,” “mighty God,” in 9:6. He who is anointed with the Spirit of counsel and might knows what to do when His people are in dire need and gives counsel and brings His people the long-awaited redemption. (Stoeckhardt)

*knowledge* – That is, the forces of power and victory in that counsel, so that comfort may cling in the stricken soul and be triumphant. For the best counsel is indeed given to many, but strength does not follow, comfort does not cling and does not act in the soul. Such people despair, but he who listens to his brother comforting him then by the Word of God and obeys and accepts the Word, forsaking all vain thoughts and speculations, such a one will be saved. To him is added the Spirit of might, and these two brothers are a strong city against Satan. Here Christ is present. (Luther)

*fear of the LORD*. See Pr 1:7. (CSB)

Such attributes are called for in the leader of the people in Dt. 1:13. The words (knowledge & fear) refer to the judicial capacity of a king, which determines his activity in internal and foreign policy (cf. 1 Kg. 3:16-28; Jer. 23:5-6). This prayer of attributes is used for all who observed the Law (Dt. 4:6). (TLSB)

To knowledge belongs the fear of the Lord, so that, possessing knowledge, a man may fear to offend God lest he be puffed up. Thus the Christian man is fully equipped and a fit vessel of the Lord if he has wisdom, that is, purity of teaching, if he has understanding, that is, if he guards that doctrine pure and unimpaired, if he has counsel and if victory over temptation follows, if he leads an upright life with his brothers and uses all things to advantage and not as<sup>4</sup> a stumbling block in the fear of the Lord. But where the fear of the Lord has been absent, the rest is easily perverted. This is a picture and description of Christ’s kingdom. These are His weapons. In this way that kingdom is extended and the twigs bear fruit. (Luther)

*Spirit of counsel* – Used to describe two of the four names given of the messianic King in 9:6. Mentioned in Pr 8:14 to describe someone who is wise. (TLSB)

The last named pair refers to the direct relationship of the Son of David to God and His conduct toward God. Knowledge is grounded in love-fellowship. Fear of the Lord is given in adoration. (Stoeckhardt)

**11:3-4** *he shall not judge...meek of the earth* – Fruits of the indwelling of the Spirit in this King’s and administration contrast with the traits of the leaders depict it in 1:21-23; 5:18-23. This king will see things as they really are and not judge by mere outward appearance (1 Sm. 16:7). The king manifests righteousness by helping the poor and needy, the widows and orphans (v. 2; Ex. 22:22; Ps. 45:4) and is thereby the work of the Lord Himself (Ps. 9:6; 68:5). He will also punish the evildoer (Jb. 4:9; Ps.139:19; 2 Th. 2:8). (TLSB)

**11:3** *delight in the fear of the LORD*. See Jn 8:29. (CSB) (CSB)

The attributes in verses three and four are rooted in faith, the fear of the Lord (Pr. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33); to ignore this proper fear is to do evil. Submission to the ways of the Holy One of Israel grants success to this king, as emphasized at the beginning of verse three. (TLSB)

That is Christ, for His kingdom, where things are done in a straightforward manner without respect of persons. No one will be justified by any works whatever, no matter how many, but by faith alone, which comes forth from the fear of the Lord, before whom no one will be able to stand by his own merits, but all these will be denied and will be like masks. There the truth and the mystery will count, not mask and outward appearance. We are dead in alien sin; we must live by alien righteousness. (Luther)

The fear of the Lord is an offering which men bring to Christ. He has pleasure in this offering. The son of David, the despised Branch (v.1) upon completing his work on earth in the power of the Spirit of God (v. 2), now sits upon the throne of God (v. 3). He is exalted to God and by his exultation has been rightly manifested as the mighty God. The consummate son of man now pours out the Spirit, with which he himself was anointed and which is his own, over all flesh and through his Spirit implants the fear of the Lord, yes, knowledge of the Lord, fear and love into men's hearts. So he brings much fruit. So he begets many children, who have his mind, his nature. And as God he now accepts the offering men bring and in such offering of the heart, in the fear of the Lord he has delight and pleasure. He is not, as it goes on, guided by and does not resolve according to what he sees and hears, does not judge according to outward appearances, but he looks at the heart, he searches the hearts and reins. And those who fear God with whole heart are pleasing to him; they are his dear children. (Stoekhardt)

*shall not judge by what his eyes see* – We, too, should well learn this, not to permit appearance to impress us, lest we judge a girl reading a book to be better than one who sweeps the house. In his innocence a Christian in no way changes appearance; he only has a heart full of faith. He indeed does harm to no one, but his uprightness is not in a painted form. This single praise is given to the godly, that they fear the Lord. Of the ungodly, on the contrary, it is said in Ps. 36:1: “There is no fear of God before his eyes.” The godly make no claims for themselves, but rather whatever they have they acknowledge to be a gift of God's grace; they have nothing to offer God, but they only receive from Him. The ungodly in their desire to influence God by their works despise God and make gods of themselves. David says in 2Sam. 23:3: “When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God,” that is to say, the reign of God is in His fear. Let confidence outside one's own works be feared, and let God be revered as Father, so that He may not be offended. He is, however, offended especially by presumption based on one's own deeds. Moreover, judging and accusing are here taken not in a private but in a public sense, namely, through the Word, whereby the ungodly will be accused and the godly consoled. “The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him,” Ps. 147:11 says. Sham avails nothing but is an abomination to God. However, the people of Christ's kingdom are the poor, the mean, the insignificant, the faint-hearted, the harassed, the lowly, the fearful. These He will judge; that is, He will make the just cause prevail, He will justify them, He will give them grace, He will forgive the sins of those who acknowledge and confess them and do not rely on themselves. He says in Matt. 5:3: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, etc.” Therefore they will be judged with righteousness, that is, they will have righteousness and will increase in it, they will be reproved with equity, which is the righteousness of faith, whereby they are upright before God and men; they do for both God and men what pleases them: glory to God and kindness to men. The ungodly, who regard themselves as holy and defend their sins, are not of Christ's kingdom; they do not enjoy the righteousness and equity of Christ. (Luther)

**11:4** *righteousness ... judge.* The rulers of Isaiah's day lacked these qualities. (CSB)

God rules rightly and fairly, not in self-interest or exploitation. (TLSB)

*poor* – They are poor, lowly since they have to suffer much at the hands of the hostile world and for that reason demonstrate their fear of God in humility, meekness, and patience. However, as their King, Judge, and Ruler they have that very Christ who sits upon the throne of God. He judges them with equity and righteousness. He takes them into His safe-keeping. He does not permit them to go to destruction. He helps them obtain justice. (Stoekhardt)

*rod of his mouth.* Assyria was God's rod in 10:5, 24, but the Messiah will rule the nations with an iron scepter (Ps 2:9; Rev 19:15). (CSB)

This is the weight of His Word (Cf. 49:2; Hos. 6:5; Rev. 1:16). (TLSB)

The rod is the spoken Word. Behold, lip and tongue and mouth of Christ are all who sincerely preach the Gospel, as God said in Jer. 15:19: “If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless (that is, if you distinguish the spirit from the flesh), you shall be as My Mouth.” (Luther)

*with breath of his lips* – That is, with the exhalation of His mouth. This is the same spoken Word, and it has power both to save and to destroy. It saves the godly, that is, those who believe and make no claims for themselves, but it destroys the ungodly, that is, those who are proud in their own wisdom and righteousness. But it smites and brings to naught earthly and ungodly men, toward repentance and toward conversion and toward constant enlargement of His reign. (Luther)

His Word is powerful and brings about what it says. (TLSB)

**11:5 belt.** When a man prepared for vigorous action, he tied up his loose, flowing garments with a belt (see 5:27). (CSB)

The waist and the belt are parallel concepts for emphasis. Isaiah also uses the image of the breastplate of righteousness in 59:16-17 to depict the Lord's action to intercede for His people. This image is picked up by Pau in Eph. 6:14 to describe the gifts of warfare the Lord gives to the baptized. (TLSB)

Both Christ and His kingdom have their own weapons, which are not physical, to be sure, as we read in Eph. 6:10 ff., 2Cor. 10:4, and 1 Thess. 5:8. But righteousness and faith are His sword. By it all trials are overcome, when we believe that Christ is our Protector, in whom we have all things, even though we are sinners. Such, then, is this kingdom, that first the spoken Word of God is proclaimed and then it is believed, the Holy Spirit being active in both cases. This is the righteousness before God and, as 1 John 5:4 calls it, “the victory that overcomes the world” and all evils. This is the difference between this kingdom and all others, which are physical. (Luther)

As the girdle holds clothing around the body, so Christ's kingly rule is ordered and normed by righteousness and faithfulness. He applies His righteousness and faithfulness by restraining and warding off the enemies of His church and by mightily protecting and upholding His poor church. (Stoeckhardt)

The King described by Isaiah wears two belts: righteousness and faithfulness. Both of these concepts focus on the work of this King has come to perform. He is just and holy before God and has come to make all the world righteous and just (Romans 3). The belt of righteousness is spiritual equipment, and so is the belt of faithfulness. Here faithfulness us steadiness and reliability. He does not change His mind or course. The King steadfastly pursues the policy He has determined. What this King reveals and promises will be done. He is faithful to all He says. (PBC)

2 Timothy 2:13, “If we are faithless, He will remain faithful. For He cannot disown Himself.”

**11:6–9†** The peace secured by the “Prince of Peace” (9:6) produces a dramatic change in the lives of his subjects “which transcends all understanding” (Php 4:7). It is no less radical than the reversal from prevailing hostile instincts in the animal world to the harmony which prevailed in the Garden of Eden before sin turned all of creation into an arena of conflict. (CSB)

**11:6 wolf shall dwell with the lamb** – This is the fruit and power of that girdle and armor, the preaching of faith. These are allegories. Then, he says, the tyrants who formerly preened themselves with their power, wisdom, and wealth will shed their feathers and tufts and with bowed neck confess themselves to be sinners, and they will be harmless. And he says, the wolf will associate with the lamb. Not the lamb with the wolf. The tyrant will become a martyr, and the wolf a teacher. The wolves are false teachers according to Matt. 7:15. Paul was a wolf before his conversion. The lambs are the Christians. With the latter the

former will be wise in spirit. The young goats are, of course, those that were a clean offering in the Law, not those of whom Matt. 25:32 f. speaks. These are martyrs. Leopards are persecuting tyrants. This is what the Word of God does; it casts down the proud and lifts up the lowly. The calves are the faithful. The lions are the rich. Lion cubs are said to act more fiercely than the adults. That is, those who formerly yielded to no one now obey the Gospel preached to them by the least of the brethren, and they gladly hear the Word. Thus in time past the prophets guided the kings. The sheep, in Hebrew אֵיִקָּ, which denotes a fading; the cow, פָּרָה; the animal that has not calves but whelps; and that which has cubs will be pastured together. That is: Human beings differing extremely among themselves—savage, wild, irascible, hateful, murderous, ungovernable, and the people of the gentle Christ—come to agreement through the preaching of the Gospel. The church will convert the nations not by force but by the goodness of the Word. The lion will fill himself with straw and stubble, that is, he will become tame and adopt a domestic gentleness, just as the ox will submit to the hand. (Luther)

This is obviously figurative language. In the context, 65:17ff., The serene joy of the eternal life, that the elect, not the animals, enjoy (v. 22), is painted in collars and pictures taken from this present world and time. We humans are in this present time limited, in our mental images as also with our language, to this material world. And so the Holy Spirit of the apps himself to our way of thinking and speaking when he wants to explain to us supernatural things, the future blessings and joys of heaven. (Stoekhardt)

But at that this is an image of creation restored (Ezk. 34:23-31; 37:26). Animals that were once prey (lamb, young goat, fattened calf) dwell safely with former predators (wolf, leopard, lion), without fear. (TLSB)

**11:8** *nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra* – Even a helpless infant, not yet weaned, will have nothing to fear. (PBC)

*hole of the cobra* – These kill by a look, and so do the heretics with their poisonous ideas and teachings, all of which the preacher draws out with the healing Word. All who are in Christ are called children, and they enjoy dealing with devils. This, then, is the fruit of the Word, to turn men from every error and tyranny. The little boy pulls the snakes out with his hand, that is, the preacher by means of the spoken Word casts out the devils because the Holy Spirit is present. (Luther)

*weaned child*. Isaiah paints the ideal picture of what nature must have been like before the fall into sin. In a world filled with hostility, bloodshed, and discord, the vision of this peaceable kingdom soothes us. (PBC)

**11:9** *they shall not hurt or destroy* – There will be supreme peace and harmony in Christ’s kingdom, and people will neither offend nor destroy one another. They have and make peace. Christians are peacemakers “among those who hate peace,” as Ps. 120:6 says, yet in such a way that the church is not changed, but the wolves, leopards, lions, and bears are. Those who hold our teaching have peace. The true knowledge of Christ begets harmony. Later, in chapter 53:11, he says: “By His knowledge He shall make many to be accounted righteous.” It is a cause of strife when everyone defends his own opinion. Those who know Christ forsake all human opinions, rely on the Word alone, and on the life and righteousness of Christ alone. In the world and in external affairs there is indeed inequality, but in Christ’s kingdom all things are one. Laws cannot bring men into agreement. Faith in Christ creates unity and makes men equal, while every other kind of righteousness is condemned. He says, the knowledge of Christ will pervade and fill all things like a kind of deluge, and human opinions will be overwhelmed in it. Christ is our peace “and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility,” as Eph. 2:14 says. (Luther)

Knowledge, love, and the fear of the Lord is the disposition of God’s true people, of the citizens and subjects of Messiah’s kingdom. This their disposition toward the Lord is then given expression and what



they do and how they behave, in their conduct among one another. They inflict no harm on one another. But they lived among one another in tranquility and love. Certainly it is the present status quo, the present disposition and of the believers that they know, fear, and love the Lord and love and do good to one another. (Stoekhardt)

In this prophecy the prophet is not looking that the future state of perfection but is describing Christ's kingdom on this earth. Those who fear the Lord, the subjects of King Christ, are the humble and the meek of v. 3, who have to endure an awful lot from the godless earth from the anti-Christian world (v. 4), therefore, still live in this evil world. (Stoekhardt)

*my holy mountain.* See 2:2–4 and note. (Almost identical to Mic 4:1–3. The theme of the “mountain of the LORD” (Mount Zion) is common in Isaiah; it occurs in passages that depict the coming of both Jews and Gentiles to Jerusalem (Zion) in the last days (see 11:9; 27:13; 56:7; 57:13; 65:25; 66:20; see also 60:3–5; Zec 14:16). The peace described in this passage has been inaugurated through the coming of Christ and the preaching of the gospel, and will be consummated at the return of Christ.) (CSB)

This is where the Lord dwells (8:18), and where perfect peace is given by the Prince of Peace (9:6). All is safe under the protecting watch of the King because of the change in the creatures on the earth. (TLSB)

*full of the knowledge.* See 2:3, where the word of the Lord is taught in Jerusalem. (CSB)

All will know the Lord (cf. Jer. 31:34), hence there will be peace. This knowledge is contrasted with the lack of understanding packed in 1:3; 6:9–10. Athanasius: “if a man will but look up to heaven, he sees its order, or if he cannot raise his face to heaven, but only to man, he sees the Lord's power shown by His works, and learns that he alone among men is God the Word” (NPNF 2 4:61). (TLSB)

It is undoubtedly true that believers on earth are still plagued by their sinful nature and that this nature will lead to trouble, discord, and argument among Christians too. Nevertheless, the preaching of the gospel brings believers into agreement and motivates enemies to embrace and forgive as they have been forgiven. The peace with God through Christ produces peace among His followers. Even if that peace is marred by sins of jealousy, prejudice, pride, and hatred, it can and does exist among those who follow the Prince of Peace. (PBC)

**11:10** *In that day.* The day of victory and joy, the positive aspect of the “day of the LORD.” Israel is restored and the people praise God. Ch. 11 identifies this “day” with the Messianic age (see 11:10–11; see also 12:1, 4). (CSB)

Final establishment of the Messiah's kingdom. (TLSB)

Refers to a time (not strictly 24 hours) in which God dramatically reveals and/or executes His judgment by condemning the wicked and delivering the righteous. The prophets often use this phrase with reference to the end of history (cf 2Pt 3:10), yet it does not always have this ultimate sense. (TLSB p. 1079)

*Root of Jesse.* A Messianic title closely connected with v. 1 (see also 53:2; Ro 15:12; Rev 5:5; 22:16). (CSB)

The Messiah (cf Rv 5:5; 22:16) (TLSB)

*signal.* Peoples and nations will flock to Him as loyal troops rally around a flag. (TLSB)

First the root must be made ready and lifted up, so that the nations may then seek it. As 1 Cor. 2:8 says, none of the rulers of this age knew it. But its elevation aroused the nations to seek what the preaching of the Gospel is. Therefore it stands and is lifted up by the Spirit through the Word. But Christ is called  $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\eta$ , that is, banner and military ensign, that His reign stands up in the daily battle and its attacks; those who serve God are called the army, and God is called God of hosts. Their enemies are Satan, flesh, sins, world, death. And the Gospel is called the Word of the cross in 1 Cor. 1:18. Therefore the nations look for it, as that merchant spoken of in Matt. 13:45–46 looks for precious pearls. He “went and sold all that he had and bought it.” Thus if they repudiate all their own wisdom and righteousness and cling to Christ and His righteousness alone, they are eager to possess Him. (Luther)

*nations inquire* – In Rom. 15:12 Paul has “they shall hope”; he looked more to the substance of the statement than to the meaning of the individual words. In Hebrew it is: “And His rest shall be glory.” This passage shows the Gentiles agreeing and becoming one body with the Jews in Christ and Christ’s kingdom spreading throughout the world. This applies properly to us, just as Paul also cites it for the Gentiles. Therefore he hints that all Jewish ceremonies and rites should be abolished and every trust in any other righteousness whatever be given up for the purpose of establishing and erecting Jesse’s Root alone, that is, the real David, Christ, whom the Gentiles seek and on whom alone they rely, which is the only righteousness before God. So Christ Himself explains this passage in John 12:32: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself,” and in Luke 11:23: “He who is not with Me is against Me.” But to seek means in sincere faith to cling and to rely and to take care that He alone will be kept. (Luther)

Seek God’s direction. (TLSB)

Obviously not meant here are the Gentile nations in the totality of their individuals, since previously the earth was characterized as being godless, but the remnants from all nations. 10:19. Thus Christ appears here as the King and Ruler of the nations, who Himself draws Gentiles and makes them subject to Himself. Christ’s kingdom of peace spreads over all the earth. (Stoekhardt)

*his resting place shall be glorious* – That is, death, the end of life, the departure from this life. The death of all other kings is the end of their reign. But Christ will reign gloriously from His death forward, and this signifies His resurrection from the dead. In Ps. 8:4 we read: “What is man etc.?” The prophet calls death a rest and cessation from labors, glory after shame. To the world He seems dead and mute and inglorious. But He lives and reigns in glow. Therefore we have three elements here: (1) the raising of the ensign through the Gospel; (2) the act of seeking, receiving, believing; (3) the object of faith, the Root, that is, Christ, who reigns though dead. When the prophets speak of Christ’s reign, they speak of His humanity and of His godhead. The Root of Jesse points to the man. The fact that the nations seek Him shows that He is God. Earlier the prophet wrote (8:19): “Should not a people consult their God?” Glory and faithfulness belong to God alone, who alone helps and saves. (Luther)

Where He dwells. (TLSB)

## EPISTLE – Romans 15:4-13

*The Example of Christ*

**We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. 2 Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. 3 For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, “The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on**

**me.” 4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5 May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, 6 that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.**

**15:4** Here Paul defends his application of Ps 69:9 to Christ. In so doing, he states a great truth concerning the purpose of Scripture: It was written for our instruction, so that as we patiently endure we might be encouraged to hold fast our hope in Christ (see 1Co 10:6, 11). (CSB)

*for whatever was written* – This means the entire OT which pointed ahead to Jesus which would give them hope. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

OT is still God’s teaching for us. (TLSB)

*whatever instruction* – didaskalia – This often means Christian doctrine. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

*through endurance* – Literally, to “remain under,” the message of God’s mercy given in Scripture. (TLSB)

*have hope* – Means specific hope: the Christian faith. It includes both the subjective hope in our hearts and the object of hope – God’s promise to provide salvation on the last day. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

Scripture grants blessings that never disappoint (5:5). “When this consolation and hope [of salvation] are weakened or entirely removed by Scripture, it is certain that [the Scripture] is understood and explained contrary to the Holy Spirit’s will and meaning” (FC SD XI 92). (TLSB)

**15:5-7** Paul’s prayer for the Roman Christians summarizes his hope for how they will respond to the entire Letter. Paul makes clear that the specific unity he seeks to reinforce is between Jew and Gentile. (TLSB)

**15:5** *such harmony with one another.*† Not that believers should all come to the same conclusions on the matters of conscience discussed above, but that differences in these matters should not be allowed to destroy basic unity. (CSB)

Believers differ in many ways (12:4) but are united in Christ. (TLSB)

This means that when we do things to the pleasure of Christ unity will take place because we are emptied of our self and Christ totally fills us. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 3, Part 1)

*in accord with Christ Jesus* – Have His attitude; cf Php 2:1-11. (TLSB)

**15:6** *together* – omothumadon – To have the same goal or purpose. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

*with one voice* - This is a united confession like we do in worship with our confession of sins, creeds, doxology, hymns, and prayers. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

Despite any difference and “quarrel over opinions” (14:1) we may have, believers are one Body in Christ (cf 12:4–5) and are called to praise God together. (TLSB)

*glorify the God* – These outlooks and actions of love and edification toward each other have an ultimate purpose: That the Roma Christians give praise to God. “Praise,” “honor,” “magnify” is the necessary meaning of glorify when man is the subject and God is the object.

**15:7** *welcome one another* – proslambanesthe – To receive one another. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

Romans 14:1-23 spoke of “welcoming” into the fellowship in the matter of a specific problem; here it is the topic of a general appeal to all. The ensuing verses show that the spectrum of Jewish Christians to Gentile Christians is in view, and in chapter 16 will attach names of flesh and blood people to “each other.” The Greek word of “receive is used in a similar sense in Philemon 17 and Acts 18:26. (CC)

*as Christ welcomed you.* See 14:3, 4, 15. (CSB)

*the glory of God* –Basic thrust of Christianity. Christ has taken us to Himself despite our sins (cf 14:3). In response, believers display that same attitude of mercy toward one another (cf Eph 4:32. All this brings glory to God. (TLSB)

**15:1–7** Concludes the section begun in 14:1. Paul has dealt with quarrels over opinions and here resolves them. There are strong and weak among us in the Church. We should follow Christ’s example of accepting and striving to please others. Despite your sin and weaknesses, Christ bore the reproaches your sins deserved and welcomed you into God’s family (15:7). • Dear Father, lead me into Your Word, where I receive endurance, encouragement, and hope from You. Empower me then to welcome others, especially those weak in faith. Amen. (TLSB)

*Christ the Hope of Jews and Gentiles*

**8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to 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 praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” 10 And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” 11 And again, “Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.” 12 And again Isaiah says, “The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.” 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.**

**15:8** *Christ has become a servant to the circumcised.* Clearly revealed in his earthly ministry. He was sent to the Jewish people and largely limited his ministry to them (see Mt 15:24). God gave a special priority, so far as the gospel is concerned, to the Jews (see 3:1–8). (CSB)

Jesus was sent to the lost sheep of Israel (Mt 15:24); Paul also asserts “to the Jew first” (1:16). (TLSB)

Christ was sent to the Jews which fulfilled the promises to the patriarchs. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

Matthew 15:24 “He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

Romans 1:16 “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

*promises made to the patriarchs.* The covenant promises made to Abraham (Ge 12:1–3; 17:7; 18:19; 22:18), Isaac (Ge 26:3–4) and Jacob (Ge 28:13–15; 46:2–4). (CSB)

The OT promises to Abraham and Israel are fulfilled in Jesus. Vv 9–12 confirm the promise to all nations. (TLSB)

**15:9** *praise you among the Gentiles.* God’s redemptive work in and for Israel had in view the redemption of the Gentiles (see Ge 12:3). They would both see God’s mighty and gracious acts for his people and hear the praises of God’s people as they celebrated what God had done for them (a common theme in the Psalms; see Paul’s quotations in vv. 9b–12 and note on Ps 9:1). Thus they would come to know the true God and glorify him for his mercy (see notes on Ps 46:10; 47:9). God’s greatest and climactic act for Israel’s salvation was the sending of the Messiah to fulfill the promises made to the patriarchs and so to gather in the great harvest of the Gentiles. (CSB)

At the end of his life, David prophesied that God’s name would also be praised among the Gentile nations (cf Mt 28:19). (TLSB)

From the beginning God had the Gentiles in mind when he made his promises. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 12, Part 1)

Genesis 12:3 “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

**15:10** *rejoice O Gentiles* – Just prior to his death, Moses prophesied that Gentiles would praise God along with Israel. (TLSB)

**15:11** *all you Gentiles* – The shortest psalm (Ps 117) summons all nations to praise Israel’s God for His love and faithfulness. (TLSB)

**15:12** *Root of Jesse.* Jesse was the father of David (see 1Sa 16:5–13; Mt 1:6), and the Messiah was the “Son of David” (Mt 21:9). See Isa 11:1; Rev 5:5. (CSB)

Jesse was David’s father. David’s royal house was cut down, but the Messiah arose like a root from the stump of an olive tree. Isaiah 11 also announced that Gentile nations would hope in Christ and be under His reign. (TLSB)

*in him Gentiles will hope.* The Gentile mission of the early church was a fulfillment of this prophecy, as is the continuing evangelization of the nations. (CSB)

**15:13** *God of hope.* Any hope the Christian has comes from God. (CSB)

Paul’s prayer and wish for those who read this Letter. (TLSB)

Formal liturgical language characterizes God by naming Him the God of the gifts which He gives. He who works through Scripture to give faith, endurance, and comfort so that believers might have hope is none other than “the God of hope.” (CC)

Romans 5:3-5 “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hope cannot be conjured up by man's effort; it is God's gift by his Spirit (see 8:24–25). (CSB)

He makes all things work together for their good, even the tensions created by the coexistence of the strong and weak in faith. (Franzmann)

**15:8–13** The OT looked ahead to a day when Jews and Gentiles would worship God together. This day has come in Christ. Gentiles in particular should remember their hopeless existence apart from Christ (cf Eph 2:11–12). According to His prophetic promises, God has raised up Jesus. In Him, Jews and Gentiles are united to “glorify God for His mercy” (v 9). • Thank You, God, for Your Word and for Jesus, who embodies and fulfills it. By Your Holy Spirit, fill me with hope and “joy and peace in believing” (v 13). Amen. (TLSB)

## GOSPEL – Matthew 3:1-12

### *John the Baptist Prepares the Way*

**In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup>“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” <sup>3</sup>For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.’”<sup>4</sup> Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup>Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, <sup>6</sup>and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>7</sup>But 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 wrath to come? <sup>8</sup>Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup>And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>10</sup>Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>11</sup>“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. <sup>12</sup>His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”**

**3:1** *in those days* – This often pointed to the end times and the Last Day (Mt. 7:22; 24:19, 22, 29, 36; 26:29). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

The most remarkable thing about the opening phrase “now in those days” is precisely its ordinary character. Though the readers/hearers know the narrative has now passed from the time of Jesus' early childhood to the time when he is an adult, this passage of years has no significance in the narrative. Beginning with the conception and birth of this Jesus, a new time has begun: “those days.” Only the insignificant particle *δέ* (*év dé ...*) separates chapter 3 from chapter 2. The chapters are linked by their *theological* continuity, which finds expression in the common phrasing of “in the days of Herod the king” (2:1) and “in those days” (3:1). Like chapters 1 and 2, chapter 3 stresses the fulfillment of OT Scripture in those days (3:3). The time of fulfillment has come (1:22; 2:15, 17, 23), the Baptizer himself also was spoken of in Scripture (3:3), and the plan of God is now being unfolded. “Those days” (3:1), about which chapters 1 and 2 have been speaking, are continuing in chapter 3. Structurally, this is one more indication that the first major section of Matthew's Gospel extends on beyond the end of chapter 2. (CC)

*John the Baptist.* The forerunner of Jesus, born c. 7 B.C. to Zechariah, a priest, and his wife Elizabeth (see Lk 1:5–80). (CSB)

Son of Zechariah, an elderly priest, and his wife, Elizabeth, Mary’s relative (cf Lk 1:36; 57–66). (TLSB)

*preaching.* God called John to prepare the way for Jesus (v 3). (TLSB)

*Desert of Judea.* An area that stretched some 20 miles from the Jerusalem-Bethlehem plateau down to the Jordan River and the Dead Sea, perhaps the same region where John lived (cf. Lk 1:80). (CSB)

Note from Mark 1:4 – Prophets and their activity are frequently set in the wilderness (e.g., Elijah; 1 Kg. 19:4-8). (TLSB)

After the exodus, grumbling Israel spent 40 years in the wilderness, and the prophet Isaiah often spoke of a second exodus in which God would again lead his people through the desert to repentance and salvation. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

**3:2 Repent.** Make a radical change in one’s life as a whole. (CSB)

This exhortation, which John addressed to all Israel, called for a radical transformation of the entire person, a fundamental turnabout. To repent meant to be converted from unbelief to faith. “With one bolt of lightning, he hurls together both <those selling and those buying works>. He says: ‘Repent!’ [Matthew 3:2]. Now one group imagines, ‘Why, we have repented!’ The other says, ‘We need no repentance’ ” (SA III III 30-4.3.31). (TLSB)

metanoew –To turn. John urges his hearers to change their way of life as a result of a complete change of thought and attitude regard to sin and righteousness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

As John’s ministry of baptizing (3:4–6) and his ministry of denunciation (3:7–10) make clear, the Baptizer is calling upon Israel to turn and *be converted*, to become once again the flock of the divine Shepherd. The Israel of John’s day is a flock of lost sheep (10:6; 15:24), and John is calling them away from God’s final judgment to conversion and true faith in the God from whom they have wandered. As the textual note on 3:2 shows, every other Matthean use of this verb μετανοέω, as well as all Matthew’s uses of the noun μετάνοια and one of his three uses of the closely related μεταμέλομαι, has this same strong meaning of “be converted.” John is in the desert from which Israel first entered the promised land long ago, in the water through which they entered the land (Joshua 3–4), and he is calling them out of the land, to enter it again and become God’s people. By their unbelief they had become like the apostate Israelites who were exiled. As Is 40:3 announced the new exodus redemption that God was performing, which received preliminary fulfillment by God bringing Israel from Babylon back to the land after his people’s unbelief and judgment, so John stands in the desert to perform the same function. (CC)

*the kingdom of heaven.* A phrase found only in Matthew, where it occurs 33 times. Mark and Luke refer to “the kingdom of God,” a term Matthew uses only four times (see note on Mk 11:30). The kingdom of heaven is the rule of God and is both a present reality and a future hope. The idea of God’s kingdom is central to Jesus’ teaching and is mentioned 50 times in Matthew alone. (CSB)

This expression, used 32 times in Mt, means the same as “kingdom of God.” “Kingdom” might better be translated “reign” because it refers not to a geographical location but to God’s act of ruling. (TLSB)

The very nature of heaven when we have Jesus. Jesus was in their midst and therefore the kingdom was among them. Matthew favors “kingdom of heaven” over “kingdom of God” because he wants to remain

sensitive to the Jewish reluctance to use “God” or his name. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

Throughout this commentary, the translation of βασιλεία will consistently be “reign” rather than “kingdom.” This is an attempt to capture the more dynamic, active sense of God’s reigning, God’s coming forth to rule and exert his royal power. The close proximity of the cognate verb βασιλεύω in 2:22 reminds us that the noun βασιλεία implies the *action*, the *activity* of kingly ruling. In this understanding, the genitive in the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν is subjective, that is, “heaven’s (God’s) act of ruling.” (CC)

*At hand* – The perfect indicative active form (ἤγγικεν) of the verb ἐγγίζω serves well to express the eschatological tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” The verb normally means “approach, draw near,” but not necessarily “arrive.” Yet the perfect indicative active form expresses an ongoing resultant state, hence the translation “stands near.” Is God’s kingly ruling activity fully present? No. Has it begun to operate? Yes, and John’s preaching is part of it. John’s connection to the reign of heaven is in view (cf. 11:12). (CC)

God’s rule was near in Christ. (TLSB)

**3:3** All three Synoptic Gospels quote Isa 40:3 (Luke quotes two additional verses) and apply it to John the Baptist. (CSB)

*Spoken by the prophet Isaiah* – John the Baptist was the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3. “A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.” (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)

How could John the Baptizer appear in the desert and say such things? Matthew answers precisely this question, introducing 3:3 with the causal γάρ, “*For* this is the one ...” Why was it John, of all people, who proclaimed that the nation of Israel must return to its God because the end-time royal ruling activity of God stood near? He was the one spoken of in Is 40:3! In the original context of Is 40:3, the eighth-century prophet Isaiah describes a herald who will announce the good tidings of God’s mercy in restoring the exiles of Judah to the land. (CC)

*A voice* – The prophet Isaiah so described the Lord’s forerunner, John. (TLSB)

*make straight paths for him.* Equivalent to “Prepare the way for the Lord.” (CSB)

Repentance is compared to building a straight road. (TLSB)

Both the (וַיִּבְנֶה לְאֵלֹהֵינוּ, “a highway for our God”) and the ἀς τρίβους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, “the paths of our God”) end with “our God.” Matthew’s rendering, literally, “the ways *of him*,” and John the Baptizer’s role as forerunner of Christ make it all the more certain that John is preparing the way for the κύριος, that is, Jesus, who is “God is with us” (1:23). Here is an instance of the most common way that the NT writers proclaim the deity of Christ: they take an OT citation or reality and put Jesus into the place of Yahweh, the God of Israel. (CC)

**3:4** *John wore a garment* – He was dressed for the location. His appearance and his stern sermon illustrated how little we need fancy clothes. The message carries it self. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 6, Part 1)



In emphasizing John's appearance and dress, the evangelist is drawing a parallel between the Baptizer and Elijah of old. The similarity in wording between LXX Ki 1:8, where Elijah is recognized precisely from his austere appearance, and Mt 3:4 is probably sufficient to show that Matthew intends this connection. The later teaching of Jesus about John's unique significance in the history of salvation (11:7–15) makes the case certain: "He is Elijah, who is to come" (11:14). (CC)

Moses & Joshua / Elijah & Elisha / John & Jesus

*locusts and wild honey.* A man living in the desert did not hesitate to eat insects, and locusts were among the clean foods (Lev 11:21–22). John's simple food, clothing and life-style were a visual protest against self-indulgence. (CSB)

**3:5** *going out to him* – This is the imperfect tense which means "they kept coming to out to him."

John's preaching caused enormous excitement. (TLSB)

**3:6** *were baptized him* – Those who were baptized and confessed their sins could be certain of the forgiveness of sins (cf Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3). John Chrysostom: "When the sacrifice was not yet offered ... how was remission to take place?... Had they not condemned themselves, they could not have sought after His grace; and not seeking, they could not have obtained remission. Thus that baptism led the way for this; wherefore also he said, that 'they should believe on Him which should come after him' " (*NPNF* 1 10:62–63). (TLSB)

The goal of John's Baptism at the Jordan River was to produce repentance. (TLSB)

It should be noted that John's baptism is *not* the same thing as Christian Baptism, although there are obvious shared characteristics. (CC)

There were various water and purification rites in Judaism of the first century AD, although there is not enough information available to us to know precisely how they functioned. In some ways, perhaps, John's baptism was similar to the rites of other groups in his historical context. Yet the uniqueness of John's baptism is shown in its relation to his preaching. Just as John shockingly addressed his call to conversion to *Israel*, and not to Gentiles or to a subgroup within Judaism, so John's baptism is for all *Israel*, and not for a subgroup in Israel or for Gentiles only. Just as John announced the in-breaking of God's end times and his kingly ruling deeds, so John's baptism "was eschatological and probably sealed the repentant, marking them as those who would pass through the coming judgment to enter the messianic kingdom." (CC)

What did John's baptism do? In the first place, it is necessary to distinguish, as John himself does, between his baptism with water and the baptism that Jesus himself will administer on the Last Day, a baptism "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:11). John's baptism prepared the people for that end-time event, but it was not that event. Nor should we equate John's baptism with Christian Baptism, the institution of which comes at the very end of Matthew's Gospel, and which incorporates the baptized into the Triune name of God Christian Baptism seals the believer for salvation at the final end-time baptism that Christ will pour out, and it anticipates that end-time event. Christian Baptism thus joins the baptized to the Last Day. (CC)

What, then, did John's baptism do? Here in Matthew, there is an interesting sort of reciprocal relationship between John's preaching of repentance (that is, turning from unbelief and to faith in the God whom John is proclaiming) and John's ministry of baptism. On the one hand, the people who came to his baptism seem to have already repented, because as they were being baptized they were confessing their sins (see

the textual note on 3:6). On the other hand, John's later words, when taken in what is probably their most natural grammatical sense, indicate that his baptism results in repentance ("I myself am baptizing you with water for/unto repentance"; see the first textual note on 3:11). Although Matthew does not give us any explicit information about the precise relationship between John's baptism and the forgiveness of sins, Matthew's narrative would surely accommodate the idea that God forgave the people's sins through John's baptism, since the people being baptized are confessing the sins from which they need to be saved, and from which Jesus will save them (1:21). We can conclude, then, that through John's baptism God granted forgiveness and further repentant faith. John's preaching had already moved the people to participate in this new, end-time reentry into the Promised Land and into membership in God's covenant people, and to look for the Mightier One and his end-time deeds. (CC)

The baptism of John was a baptism with water (John 1:33), of repentance for the remission of sin (Mark 1:4). It was administered in the name of the Triune God, who had commanded it (John 1:33), and was an effective means of grace (John 3:5). (Summary of Doctrine – Koehler)

During the public ministry of Christ His disciples likewise baptized (John 3:22; 4:2), which Baptism was essentially the same as John's. And it does not appear that those who were baptized by John or by the disciples of Jesus were later re-baptized, when Christ instituted His Baptism. However, after John had died, some of his disciples did not join themselves to Christ, to whom the Baptism of John pointed, but continued as a separate sect, and baptized "unto John's baptism" (Acts 19:3). The baptism of these later disciples of John was not commanded by God, did not point to Christ as the Savior from sin, and was, therefore, not valid. (Summary of Doctrine – Koehler)

From these verses it has been estimated that from 200,000 to 500,000 people were baptized by John. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

*confessing their sins* – This complexity shows that true repentance—the turning away from sin and unbelief and toward God in faith—comes by the Word of God, the end-time proclamation of the reigning activity that God is now beginning in Jesus. Thus John's preaching produces repentance. That repentance continues to be expressed by the people confessing their sins as they are baptized with John's baptism. Moreover, the gift that is John's baptism also produces ongoing repentance and faith in the One whom John is announcing. (CC)

**3:7 Pharisees and Sadducees.** The Pharisees were a legalistic and separatistic group who strictly, but often hypocritically, kept the law of Moses and the unwritten "tradition of the elders" (15:2). The Sadducees were more worldly and politically minded, and were theologically unorthodox—among other things denying the resurrection, angels and spirits (Ac 23:8). (CSB)

*Coming to his baptism* – The grammar alone (literally, "were coming for his baptism") does not indicate whether the religious leaders sought to receive John's baptism or merely to observe the phenomenon. The other Matthean uses of ἔρχομαι plus ἐπί plus the accusative (here: τὸ βάπτισμα) are not decisive (3:16; 10:13; 14:34; 21:19; 23:35). However, the context supports the view that the religious leaders are actually intending to be baptized by John. John sarcastically wonders who warned *them* to flee the coming wrath, a comment that makes best sense if they were coming to be baptized, not just observe. Moreover, John's demand that Israel's religious leaders bring forth the deeds that mark a *genuine* repentance implies that they were claiming an external repentance, and thus a desire for John's baptism, outwardly behaving the same as the others, who were "confessing their sins" as "they were being baptized" (3:6). Thus, in this context "for his baptism" almost certainly means "in order to receive his baptism." (CC)

*Brood of vipers* – The negative force of this epithet, “offspring of vipers,” is naturally appreciated by considering the reputation of vipers throughout the Scriptures. This identical phrase is repeated in Mt 12:34; 23:33; and Lk 3:7. Mt 23:33 is similar to Mt 3:7 in that Jesus applies the phrase to the scribes and Pharisees, then asks how they could “flee” (φεύγω, as in 3:7) the coming judgment. The only other NT verse with ἔχιδνα is Acts 28:3, which indicates that it refers to a venomous viper, normally deadly. It is absent from the LXX it is not, however, a veiled reference to Satan, who is named ὁ ὄφις as well as ὁ δράκων. Also, if a reference to Satan were intended, one might expect the singular form, “offspring of the viper.” (CC)

*Flee from the wrath to come*– The coming wrath is eschatological but not limited to that. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**3:8 bear fruit** – The Pharisees and Sadducees wanted John to baptize them without having repented and confessed their sins. Their works should give evidence of sincere repentance (cf. Lk. 3:10-14). “Confession, too, cannot be false, uncertain, or fragmentary. A person who confesses that everything in him is nothing but sin includes all sins, excludes none, forgets none. Neither can the satisfaction be uncertain, because it is not our uncertain, sinful work. Rather, it is the suffering and blood of the innocent Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (SA III 37-38) (TLSB)

**3:9 We have Abraham as our father.** See Jn 8:39. Salvation does not come as a birthright (even for the Jews) but through faith in Christ (Ro 2:28–29; Gal 3:7, 9, 29). (CSB)

The key lies in his statement in 3:9, “And do not think that you will go on saying among yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as father,’ for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise children for Abraham.” John has called the people out to a new exodus and back through the waters of the Jordan—in short, to conversion and faith again in the God who is about to manifest his reign on the earth in his Son. The promises to Abraham will be fulfilled; God is able to do such as he pleases. Physical descent from Abraham, however, is no substitute for heartfelt brokenness and confession of sin. The only proper response to such a call is to acknowledge one’s need, one’s complete absence of merit, that all are completely poor in spirit (5:3). (CC)

Their spiritual confidence based on biological descent from Abraham was no substitute for repentance. (TLSB)

*From these stones* – (Jews sometimes referred to Gentiles as stones) Implicit in this statement is the idea that those not descended from Abraham, the Gentiles, God can raise up, despite their total lack of life. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

*Raise up children of Abraham* – This means “children of God, believers. The Jews predicated membership in the Kingdom on mere physical descent. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**3:10 The ax is already at the root of the trees.** Judgment is near. (CSB)

What of those who refuse to repent, who would try to stand before God the King with anything other than complete dependence on his grace? The axe is laid to the root of such trees! These are the trees that, lacking true repentance, do not bear good fruit; they are about to be cut down and thrown into the fire! (CC)

Not fruit, limbs or trunk which are dead, but at the very root. Total cutting off is imminent. The wrath of God abides on him who rejects Christ. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

Jerusalem was destroyed 40 years later.

*Thrown into the fire* – The last four words denote its total uselessness (Cf. John 3:19-20). The works of the impenitent man are evil and useless. He hates Jesus, the Light, and refuses to come to Him, lest his works be made evident. (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

**3:11** *with water for repentance.* John’s baptism presupposed repentance, and he would not baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees because they failed to give any evidence of repentance (vv. 7–8). (CSB)

*Mightier* – The word means “beyond” anything he could do.

*Sandals* – Only the humblest slave removed sandals.

*with the Holy Spirit and with fire.* Demonstrated in a dramatic way at Pentecost (Ac 1:5, 8; 2:1–13; 11:16), though here “fire” may refer to judgment to come (see v. 12). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all God’s people was promised in Joel 2:28–29. (CSB)

Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit those who repent, but the unrepentant will experience the fire of eternal punishment. Jesus baptized His disciples with the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:33) and continues to pour out the Spirit on believers through Word and Sacrament. (TLSB)

John, then, proclaims in 3:11 that Jesus will fully pour out salvation (“the Holy Spirit”) and judgment (“fire”) at the eschaton. Though Matthew’s Gospel gives us no direct information about Pentecost and the pouring out of the Spirit on the church, we can suggest a relationship between Pentecost and the Last Day. The pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost was for salvation, for forgiveness and reconciliation with God; these gifts already given will avail for final salvation *on Judgment Day*. Moreover, we know that Paul reveals that the Holy Spirit, who is already given through post-Pentecost Christian Baptism, is the down payment of our final eschatological inheritance (Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5). Accordingly, though John’s words in Mt 3:11 do not refer directly to Christian Baptism, there is an unbreakable link between Christ’s final work of salvation at the eschaton and the present giving of the Spirit in Holy Baptism. It is likely, however, that from his vantage point, John the Baptizer was not able fully to see this connection. (CC)

**3:12** *His winnowing fork.* For the process of winnowing. Here it is figurative for the day of judgment at Christ’s second coming. The OT prophets and NT writers sometimes compress the first and second comings of Christ so that they seem to be one event. (CSB)

A beautiful metaphor, the threshing floor. With finality grain and chaff are thrown up for the wind to drive the chaff away, never to be joined again. A stern warning: “If you reject this Christian baptism in impenitence you must face Christ as Judge.” (Cf. Jn. 3:36) (Exegetical Notes – Buls)

*Wheat into the barn* – Just as the harvester saved the wheat, God will save His people. Barn here means pit or silo for storing grain. (TLSB)

*Chaff...will burn* – This likely refers to cleanup at the end of threshing season. Chaff had no value and so was burned. This is the eternal fate of those who refuse to repent. (TLSB)

*Unquenchable fire* – God’s judgment (cf. Is.30:27; Mal 3:2). (TLSB)

**3:1–12** John was a preacher of repentance, as was Martin Luther, who often emphasized that we believers must not only sincerely confess our sins but also be certain of forgiveness. Thank God for such preachers.

• Almighty God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Burn my chaff, but quench my sinful passions in the daily washing of Holy Baptism. Amen. (TLSB)