

Notes for Next Sunday
Second Sunday in Advent

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isaiah 11:1-10). Isaiah speaks here 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. 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. (Stoeckhardt)

Epistle (Romans 15:4-13). 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. This means the entire OT which pointed ahead to Jesus which would give them hope. The OT is still God's teaching for us. 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. From the beginning God had the Gentiles in mind when he made his promises.

Gospel (Matthew 3:1-12). The Israel of John's day is a flock of lost sheep and John is calling them away from God's final judgment to conversion and true faith in the God from whom they have wandered. 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.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 11:1-10

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. ²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD— ³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; ⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. ⁵Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. ⁶The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. ⁹They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. ¹⁰In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

11:1 will bear fruit. The coming messiah will fully be what God desires and willfully do what God desires (cf. Jn 15:5). (TLSB)

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

11:4 rod of his mouth. This is the weight of His Word. (TLSB)

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

11:6 wolf live with lamb. But at that this is an image of creation restored.

11:10 In that day. Final establishment of the Messiah's kingdom. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Romans 15:4-13

⁴For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. ⁵May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, ⁶so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. ⁸For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs ⁹so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name." ¹⁰Again, it says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people." ¹¹And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples." ¹²And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him." ¹³May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

15:5 a spirit of unity among yourselves. Believers differ in many ways (12:4) but are united in Christ. (TLSB)

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

15:13 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)

GOSPEL – Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea ²and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." ³This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" ⁴John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. ⁷But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. ¹¹"I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. ¹²His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

3:1 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)

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

3:2 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. 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)

3:3 spoken of through 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)

3:3 make straight paths for him. Repentance is compared to building a straight road. (TLSB)

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

3:5 people went out. This is the imperfect tense which means "they kept coming to out to him."

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. (CSB)

3:9 of 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 – Bult)

3:10 The ax is already at the root of the trees. Judgment is near. Jerusalem was destroyed 40 years later. (CSB)

3:11 sandals. Only the humblest slave removed sandals.

3:12 His winnowing fork. 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 – Bult)