

Advent Season

Colour: purple

Second Sunday of Advent Year A

First Reading Isaiah 11.1-10

The Branch From Jesse

1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—

3 and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears;

4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash round his waist.

6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.

7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

8 The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.

9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

What's going on?

The prophet Isaiah offers a vision of God's chosen one. He will be filled with God's spirit and peace will fill the earth. Isaiah offers this vision through a series of striking images. Predators will not kill prey, animals that would not dare go near other animals will be able to live safely with them. Children will not get bitten by deadly snakes, - all our expectations about danger, death and turmoil will be changed. This is what God's reign means, - peace and safety. Further God's chosen one will stop injustice and oppression, no one need live in fear or suffering any longer.

Psalm 72 (71 Roman Catholic)

1 Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness.

2 He will judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice.

3 The mountains will bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness.

4 He will defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; he will crush the oppressor.

5 He will endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations.

6 He will be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth.

7 In his days the righteous will flourish; prosperity will abound till the moon is no more.

8 He will rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.

9 The desert tribes will bow before him and his enemies will lick the dust.

10 The kings of Tarshish and of distant shores will bring tribute to him; the kings of Sheba and Seba will present him gifts.

11 All kings will bow down to him and all nations will serve him.

12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no-one to help.

13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death.

14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight.

15 Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given to him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long.

16 Let corn abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. Let its fruit flourish like Lebanon; let it thrive like the grass of the field.

17 May his name endure for ever; may it continue as long as the sun.

All nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed.

18 Praise be to the LORD God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvellous deeds.

19 Praise be to his glorious name for ever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen.

20 This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse.

What's going on?

The psalm carries on in the same vein as the first reading. God's intention is that the poor and needy should be helped and saved. God's chosen one will usher in a reign of peace and stability, in which there is nothing but human flourishing, because this is what God wants for human beings. When this happens, it will be wonderful.

Second Reading Romans 15 4-9 (CofE) -13 (RC)

4 For 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.

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus,

6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of

7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

8 For 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

9 so 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.

10 Again, it says,

Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.

11 And again,

Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.

12 And 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.

13 May 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.

What's going on?

St Paul reminds his friends to pay attention to the messages of scripture, and especially he repeats Isaiah to remind Christians of the vision of Isaiah and assure his friends that the vision includes people who are not Jewish. The scriptures have a message for everyone and the Spirit of God can inspire every person to live as God desires.

Gospel Matthew 3. 1-12

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea

2 and saying, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

3 This 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.'

4 John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt round his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey.

5 People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan.

6 Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptising, he said to them: You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

8 Produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

9 And 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.

10 The axe 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 baptise 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 baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

12 His 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.

What's going on?

This gospel tells us about John the Baptist out in the desert telling everyone to get ready for the coming of Jesus. He too, reminds them of the prophecy of Isaiah and tells them to start believing it because Jesus is here. People responded to John and were baptized and he promised that Jesus would do even more. When Jesus comes we have to be ready because through Jesus heaven is among us and we will have to choose God's way or face the consequences of living without God.

Why these passages?

These passages have more urgency. Having been told to stay awake and keep watch, we are now given a clearer picture of who Jesus is as God's Son and what his purpose on earth is. His mission is to create a world in which God's desire for humanity is made real: poverty and suffering will be alleviated and oppression and violence will stop. This mission is not just for the Jewish people into whose culture Jesus will be born, but for everyone. But we too have a mission, to prepare the world for Jesus, to make it possible for his purpose to be fulfilled. We have a choice: to live God's way or to reject it.