

Trinity Baptist Church
Sunday 20th December
Andy Banks - Isaiah 11:1-10
The promise of a renewed creation

Through Advent, we've been looking at some of the Advent promises given by God through Isaiah some 700 years before Jesus' birth, and I want to continue that today as we read from **Isaiah 11:1-10**

*1A 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 might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and 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 cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.*

*9They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with 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 resting place will be glorious.

[Pray]

“Not in that poor lowly stable with the oxen standing by ...,” we sung earlier. We don’t actually know if there were oxen in the stable when Jesus was born, but it is likely there were *animals*, essentially because there would have been nowhere else for them to go. For such a long journey Joseph and Mary probably brought a donkey with them, not to carry Mary, but to carry their provisions and clothing. And, despite our nativity plays, Jesus was almost certainly born, not in a stable at an *inn*, but in a separate room for the animals in the private home of one of Joseph’s or Mary’s relatives, whose *guest room* was already full. And it’s unlikely that a *family* would have multiple stables to move animals between. Actually, it is highly appropriate that Jesus should be born surrounded by animals, given this passage in Isaiah 11. I’ll come back to that thought later.

But first, we have here a prophecy about a coming *King*, given in the midst of a section in Isaiah when he has been warning about the imminent destruction of King David’s dynasty, because of the sin of David’s descendants.

1) Who is the coming King?

So, who is this coming King? He is pictured as a Shoot or Branch growing from the stump of Jesse. Now, Jesse was the father of King David, who became Israel’s greatest and most celebrated king because he wholeheartedly trusted in God and sought to rule under God’s overrule. But the stump, here, is another clear picture that David’s dynasty will be cut down before *this* promised King arrives – so this can’t refer merely to one of David’s good royal descendants, like Josiah or Hezekiah. *This* King must come after the exile to Babylon that ended David’s royal line. Yet, he will be a descendant of David. That’s why both Matthew and Luke are at pains to trace Jesus’ lineage through David.

Furthermore, this coming King would be a King in David’s mould – one who would be *faithful* to ruling under God’s rule, a man after God’s own heart. Indeed, looking at what this King will achieve, he will be even greater than David. And, in the light of the mind-blowing revelation of v.10, that’s not surprising. For not only will this King be the *Branch* of Jesse (one who comes from his descendants), he will also be the *Root* of Jesse (the source or Jesse’s very life). That sounds ridiculous and must have baffled scholars for many centuries. How can anyone be both their ancestor’s descendent and the source of their ancestor’s life? But, in Jesus we see the answer to that dilemma. For Jesus was both fully human – from Mary’s own flesh and blood – and fully God, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit alone. As *God*, he is the source of Jesse’s life, and as *Mary’s son* he is the human descendant of Jesse. So that’s who he is.

2) How will the coming King rule?

The second question this prophecy answers is, “*How* will this coming King rule?” And the answer is he will rule by the power of the Holy Spirit of God, or “the Spirit of the LORD,” as the prophecy describes him. Because the Spirit of God will rest on him (i.e. inhabit him): he will rule with “wisdom” (the capacity to give a right judgement) and “understanding” (the capacity to see to the heart of a matter); he will rule with “counsel” (the ability to devise a right course of action) and with “might” (the power to make that course of action happen); and he will rule with “knowledge” (an intimate relationship with God), and in “the fear of the LORD” (a deep reverence for God’s glory, and longing to see him honoured). Hence, he will be a man of “righteousness” and “faithfulness” to God, like David his ancestor.

But this coming King will be even greater. Indeed, he will possess qualities that are impossible for any mere human. For he won’t need to rely upon what he hears or sees to form his judgements – he will simply know the truth of what is in everyone’s hearts. And so his judgements will be truly just and right. No-one will be able to

pull the wool over his eyes, ever. Thus, the wicked will get their comeuppance (justly), and because of that, the poor and needy will be liberated from the oppression that the wicked held them under. This isn't a bias towards the poor – simply an ensuring that justice is done for them. And this King will achieve all of this by his word of authority alone – no other weapon will be needed. These are God-like qualities and abilities, yet they are found in a real historical human being – Jesus Christ.

3) What will the coming King achieve?

And that is even more evident when we consider the question, “What will this coming King achieve?” For the vision given here is unfathomable to the human imagination alone. Carnivores, like wolves, leopards and lions, will live in total harmony alongside defenceless young herbivores, like lambs, goats and year-old calves. And there will be no danger, for the carnivores will become herbivores, eating straw like cows.

What is pictured here is nothing less than a return to God's original design for his world in creation, before human sin damaged it. Even the enmity described between snakes and humanity in Gen 3:15 will be reversed. So, there will be no danger for the babe-in-arms or the risk-ignorant toddler in playing near the hole of the cobra or viper. Creation itself will be in complete harmony, with the divinely-given rule of humanity over creation restored to the gentle *caring* rule that God designed, not the exploitative, selfish rule we have made it. Hence the rule is pictured as a “little child” leading them! This is the final glorious victory of God for his world that the whole revelation of the Bible drives towards: “the earth *will* be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” This is God's salvation plan for which we hope, and in line with which we are called to live!

But we cannot hear those words “and a little child will lead them” and not also hear echoes of the birth of Jesus as a baby. Born not just into the humblest of *human* circumstances, but appropriately born in the midst of the animals, too, who are representatives of the whole creation which he came to redeem for God.

The birth of this God-man King, that we will celebrate on Friday, is the beginning of the realisation of this vision. Human sin was the cause of the fracturing of creation's harmony and remains the direct cause of much of that fracturing today. But God, in Jesus Christ, sacrificed himself on the cross as a human on behalf of all humanity, so that the problem of sin might be overcome. And with Jesus' resurrection, the consequence of sin, which is death, began to be reversed. This is the beginning of the new world order that we see described in this vision – the seed planted that makes it all possible. And one day, Jesus is coming back in all his kingly glory. And on that day he will finish the job he started when he came as a tiny baby. He will restore creation and all his faithful followers to its original harmony. “The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.” Amen. Come Lord Jesus!

[Pray]