

Illustrations of Immanuel: A New Branch

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Advent

Isaiah 11:1-10 There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. ² 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 of the fear of the LORD. ³ His delight is in the fear of the LORD, And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, Nor decide by the hearing of His ears; ⁴ But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, And faithfulness the belt of His waist. ⁶ "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. ⁹ They shall not hurt nor 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 "And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious."

At the time of our text Ahaz was king of Judah. Ahaz was a particularly wicked and godless king. He shut up the temple of God. He worshipped the gods of Assyria. He caused his children to "pass through the fire."

Because of his faithlessness, Judah was greatly troubled. The philistines, the Edomites, Isreal and Syria all attacked the nation of Judah. Instead of turning to the Lord Ahaz paid Tiglath-Pileser to come to his aid. The king of Assyria helped him but then made him a vassal.

Because of Ahaz's sinful choices Judah was a forgotten stump and would become even more so later on. Nevertheless, even though men fail God's promises do not. The line of David may have been a forgotten stump but out of that stump comes a branch.

Yet it is different from what came before. The spirit calls It is a branch from Jesse, David's Father, not from David.

The sons of David had failed. The descendants of David who sat on the throne had abandoned God and led Judah into captivity. The people of Judah did not need another son of David. They needed another David, a better, greater David. A King from the promised line but one who would start a new dynasty, a new kingdom, rather than continue the failing one.

God told David:

2 Samuel 7:12 "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.

His kingdom as distinct and separate from David's kingdom. This is a kingdom that is established by one from David's line but it is distinct and different from David's kingdom. Jesus is not just another son of

David. He is something new and different. He has come not to continuing a dying kingdom but establish something new and different.

A New King

What type of ruler is best? Every couple of years we must wrestle with that question. Do we want rulers who are hard on crime, or do we want rulers who are understanding and merciful? Do we want a ruler who is a good diplomat or a great general? We often must pick between them. God promises us a different king of ruler who will be all these things and more.

Our text says He will receive a spirit of wisdom and understanding, to do what is good, right, and just. He will punish the wicked, but he will also understand our frailty, our weakness, our sinfulness, he will have mercy on sinners.

He will have a spirit of counsel and might. He will be a great diplomat and a great general. He will be capable of making peace and fighting wars.

He will have the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. He will do the LORD will. This is where Ahaz had failed. He led the people away from the LORD and because of it Judah was besieged by all her enemies.

There will be a difference also in the way this root of Jesse accomplishes this work. Notice in verse 4: **He will "decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,"**

What does he use to accomplish this? Isaiah is clear he will do this with his mouth and his lips. That is, he will rule not through armies but through the preaching of God's word.

This is also what Jesus said, **"I have come to bear witness to the truth."**

Many non-Lutheran commentaries take the attitude that even though Jesus is the root of Jesse this part of the prophecy has not yet been fulfilled. One of them even said that: "It seems that Jesus failed, he hasn't failed but it is clear he hasn't finished his work yet."

This attitude comes from the failure to see that Isaiah is speaking not about a king who rules on earth through armies but a king who rules in our hearts through the preaching of the word. All that Isaiah prophesies here Jesus accomplished and still accomplishes through the preaching of God's word.

Through his word Jesus will establish a different kind of kingdom.

A New Kingdom

AS incredible as the promises in the first half of our text are, the real miracle is found in verses 6-9. It is very tempting to see the animals as metaphors. The predators and prey would be metaphors for those who are natural enemies but through Christ they learn to live in peace.

But if we see this as a metaphor for humans learning to live together in peace on this earth we are going to be disappointed. This is a promise for a completely different kind of kingdom which comes through the removal of sin, not a peaceful earthly kingdom.

If you go to google images and google peaceable kingdom, you are going to find numerous paintings of this scene. Most of these were done by Edward Hicks (1780–1849). Edward painted this same scene sixty-two different times. In these paintings you will see in the foreground predators and prey laying down together with the Christ child leading them. In the background you will see a delegation of quakers meeting with Native Americans. Edward's message is not subtle. Through Christ we can find peace with the Native Americans.

However, if you look at his early paintings you will see the Christ child with his hand laying gently on the lion, in his later paintings the child has his arm wrapped around the lion's head and gripping his mane firmly. Rather than gently leading the lion, Christ is forcibly restraining it.

Hicks himself wrote that he had become disillusioned with any hopes of establishing a peaceful kingdom on this earth. This is what always happens when we seek to realize God's kingdom on this earth. It will always fail because this world is full of sin.

God offers us something far greater than a peaceful earthly kingdom. What he offers is a removal of sin and the curse of sin. When Adam and Eve sinned, they brought death into the world, not only on themselves but upon all of God's creation. In this passage God promises to remove sin and the curse of sin, death, not only from humans but from all of creation.

Romans 8:20-21 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

To believe there was ever a time when the lion and the lamb could lie down together or that there will be again, strains credulity. It is a miracle that is perhaps even more unbelievable than the resurrection itself. Death is such an ingrained part of this world that we cannot understand how the world could even work without death. From our perspective the wolf and the lion were obviously designed to be predators. Right? How could they ever be anything else? Yet this is exactly what God's word promises. That there was a time and there will be a time again when they will not be predators. When there will be no death.

This means also that there was time and there will be a time again when we will not be who we are now. Just as we cannot imagine a world without death, so also, we cannot imagine a life without sin. Yet God promises that through this branch of Jesse that is what we will be.

Jesus has forgiven our sins now, and he will restore us in his kingdom to holiness. Now we have hearts that are filled with suspicion, anger, resentment, lust, greed. Then we will have hearts filled with love, joy, and peace.

Any attempt to get lions and lambs to live together would only end in frustration. Any attempt to make a peaceful nation on this earth will similarly end in frustration, which is not to say that we should not try.

Any attempt to live a perfect holy life in word and deed will also end in frustration, which again does not mean we should not try. But the branch of Jesse has paid for our sins and will restore us heart and mind to the image of God, and not us only but all of creation. Amen