

NORTH MAIN SERMON DECEMBER 7, 2025

2nd Sunday of Advent

Isaiah 11:1-10

The Branch From Jesse

11 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 might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and 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 around 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^[a] 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 cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

⁹ They 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.

¹⁰ In 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.

Romans 15:4-13⁴ For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 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^[a] on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed ⁹ and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name."^[b]

¹⁰ Again, it says, "Rejoice, you Gentiles, with his people."^[c] ¹¹ And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him."^[d] ¹² And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope."^[e]

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.

Matthew 3:1-12 ...John the Baptist Prepares the Way

3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea ² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'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 around 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 baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷ But 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? 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 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^[b] water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with^[c] the Holy Spirit and 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.”

The word of God...

Today as we light the 2nd candle in our Advent wreath, sometimes called the candle of Peace, sometimes called the faith candle or the Bethlehem Candle.....we will also share some additional verses from Isaiah as we go through the message today.

The candle of Peace.... Our readings for last week emphasize “to be ready” be prepared for the coming of something new and wonderful. Have faith that this is true. It is during the reign of the Messiah that God’s righteousness will be fully revealed to the world. The Book of Isaiah presents our Savior to us in undeniable detail. He will be called the Messiah, the Prince of Peace. From Paul’s Letter to the Romans we can also learn to accept one another and find peace.

From the Gospel of Matthew we hear about John the Baptist. **John in the desert was in the great tradition of the Hebrew prophets. He was aware that time was running out.** He came as a special messenger to tell people that there was someone coming after him, much greater than

he, who would make their lives very different! This person would bring hope and peace to all who have faith and love one another.

And here we are again..It's Advent - the time when we prepare ourselves for God's grand entry into the world as we know it! God literally parted our image of reality and materialized it in human form among us. One thing we can learn in Advent is about. The Advent wreath which is a circular garland of evergreen branches representing eternity. On that wreath, four or five candles are typically arranged. During the season of Advent, one candle on the wreath is lit each Sunday as a part of the Advent services. Each candle represents an aspect of the spiritual preparation for the coming of the Lord, Jesus Christ. What do the candles mean in the whelm of our Scriptures for today..**Symbolism of the Advent Wreath.. Candles..**Set on the branches of the Advent wreath are four candles: three purple candles and one pink candle. The white candle in the center of the wreath is the Christ candle. As a whole, these candles represent the coming of the light of Christ into the world. They are a never ending circle without end.

Some traditions state that the four candles, representing the four weeks of Advent, each stand for one thousand years, to total the 4,000 years from the time of Adam and Eve until the birth of the Savior. We look forward to Christmas as Christians in wonder ..

We could start the advent season with... Once upon a time... Not exactly words we associate with the Bible, but certainly words we associate with telling a story. We hear "once upon a time," and our ears perk up. We're ready to get lost in a tale that is both fantastical and all too human. Snoopy of Charlie Brown comic strip fame is typing a novel. He begins his story, "It was a dark and stormy night ..." Snoopy always starts his stories in this manner. Lucy looks at what Snoopy has written. She goes into a tirade, putting down Snoopy for such a silly beginning. Doesn't Snoopy know that any good story starts with the words, "Once upon a time ..."

The last frame of the comic strip has Snoopy starting his story again. Now he is ready. He starts with, "Once upon a time, but still adds it was a dark and stormy night." Do you feel like that sometimes? No matter how you begin your story you somehow revert to "a dark and stormy night." If you

feel that way today you are not alone. But the wonder of stories is that they communicate truths deeper than mere facts. They help us discover truths about ourselves and our community, the way humans relate to one another, what it means to believe, and how we embody our beliefs. I wonder if sometimes we get so caught up in the Bible as a telling of events that we miss the truth underneath the events and think of it as a story..in the beginning..

This is particularly relevant for this week's text and our Advent journey. Here we have John the Baptist, that locust-and-honey-eating prophet living in the wilderness and calling people then and now to repent. This is a story we might associate more with the "end of the story" of this passage. But this is Advent. We don't resolve stories in Advent. We live in the tension of the not yet. And in this tension, John the Baptist invites us to repent, to change our story, to redefine our "once upon a time" in light of the good news—the good news John the Baptist hoped for but had not yet seen. By now, we're into the story. Week two in the season of Advent feels right. Week one we were most likely not ready for, to be honest. We're not ready, even though the call is to get ready, to be ready. So, we come into the season with confession. We're not ready; we haven't been ready. We've been caught up in our own stories, getting by, getting ahead. But now it's week two, and we've gotten our Advent bearings; we've remembered our Advent responses as we walk the journey into a promised future.

John comes alongside us from last week's story to tell us we aren't ready. We haven't become the story and lived as the sign. Not yet. At least that's what he says. John the Baptist, who would be a laughingstock today, or someone to be dispensed with by the powers, comes on stage, "proclaiming a baptism of repentance." It's not a demand but a gift..Without trying, John fulfills the Isaiah quotation about preparing the way of the Lord, and from this we are able to realize the Lord whose way is prepared is none but Jesus himself.

This is an odd text when you dig into it. Something powerful is going on. John has tapped into a need; he resonates with a deep longing in the hearts of a nation. He starts with good news: "The kingdom of heaven has come near" We're almost there. We get wrapped up in the first word of this news: Repent. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near"

Suddenly, the good news doesn't sound so good. *Repent* implies something is wrong or something is broken. Repent means feeling sorry and confessing. Doesn't it?

What if repenting is something else.. a willingness to live by a different story? John might be issuing an invitation rather than a condemnation. "Get on board," he says, because what you long for is within reach. Make a turn from the path you are on, and follow a new sign, a new hope. It's right there for the taking, says John, if you'll just turn—Just say you want to see and want to be a part of this new thing.

Now, here's the weird part. After we spend a moment reflecting on the attire of John .. the preacher we see that the crowds were coming, confessing, turning, wading into the waters of the kingdom of heaven. It's a wonderful sight. Then Matthew says, "But when he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism." Notice it doesn't say "standing on the bank with a condescending look." It doesn't say, passing judgment or trying to prevent the crowds from coming forward. It says they were coming forward for baptism. But John shouts at them and calls them baby snakes. But didn't John invite them? Then he adds a new dimension to his invitation. "Bear fruit worthy of repentance." He no longer says just repent, but bear fruit worthy of repentance. Show that you have indeed made the turn. Live differently, he asks. It's not just a matter of thinking differently. The implication is that the Pharisees and Sadducees who show up for baptism need to prove their repentance by changing who they are. As long as they are participating in an oppressive system, John isn't willing to accept that their repentance is real. The story they are telling with their lives is different from the one they claim to want to join. So, John pushes, and gets personal. This isn't an easy ride, he says.. We're just getting started. There is more to come.

That is the Advent story even today. There is more to come. And that more is what motivates us, what drives us. It is the vision by which we walk, the story by which we live. More than that, it is the story that we tell with our living every day for justice and peace, for equity and hospitality. We are the sign that this story is the one that shapes our lives, the hope by which we live.

From **Isaiah we hear** For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

What can we truly say about God's everlasting love for people and his desire for peace.? Thank the LORD of heaven and earth that He loves us with such a great love that he wants us to live in peace. The love of Christ is greater and stronger than anything earthly, universal, or spiritually made or not made.

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The Key words in the Scriptures are: Promise, strength, hope, readiness, repentance and Peace.. Today we journey backwards to before Jesus' baptism, to John the Baptist prophesying the Messiah's coming - a Messiah is already here. Now is the time to get right with God, to prepare ourselves for the kingdom that is coming, the kingdom already here.

In contrast to the Holidays, Christmas is about a very different kind of dream. God's dream for us. Our deepest dream. Our life-giving hope. The hope that what seems like a nightmare for so many will give way to God's reign of love, give way to the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.

In our reading for today Paul says" Everything that was written in the past is to teach us how to live. Advent is a season of purification, of asking for cleansing. "Let every heart prepare him room." The preparation begins with God's sending of "his messenger" to "prepare the way of the Lord." ...Jesus will teach us about love, hope and peace... In the Kingdom of God, every child is loved. No one goes hungry. No one has to flee from violence. No one suffers want or deprivation, exploitation or oppression. The season of Advent prepares us to embrace that dream—that hope—with our whole being. To yield to it without reservation. And, crucially, Jesus urges us to take up this hope not by encouraging us to dream about a perfect world that doesn't exist. Instead, he confronts us with the world we actually inhabit. A world with violence, hungry people, homeless people and tragedies.

But Peace, while it seems passive, is not a passive word... it's a word of action. We do not sit on our hands and wait for God to make everything better. Peace is something we must strive for. Against all odds we resist the forces of hate and greed and fear and prejudice that would be our

undoing and we reach out to love and care for others. It's the same message as last year.. just a different year. We think our situations, world events and sufferings are unique and devastating. But our Israelite and Christian ancestors knew suffering too. When Israel was destroyed, and all hope seemed lost, God still had a plan to bring hope and salvation to the world. Jesus' birth was the coming of the long-awaited Christ, and many people wanted him to solve everything by force – to destroy evil empires and set the world right. Most of us would prefer to hide from our problems, deny them or let others work out solutions. But Jesus calls us to respond differently. God sends "messengers" to people who doubt God's care, who are cynical and hopeless. We are called to stand together in a community of believers who are willing to pray, willing to follow Jesus and willing to fight for peace. We are called to stand up and fight the injustices we see in our world, to stand up and love the unlovable, to stand up and heal brokenness, to stand up and shine light into darkness, to stand up and be the hope our world needs. We need to remember the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke: "To whom much is given, of him much shall be required." *The gifts you have received form a mandate. Show gratitude by serving. Live for a cause greater than yourself.*

Apparently, according to the Prophet Isaiah, our hope begins with a stump. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit." And Isaiah is saying that out of the Davidic line will come a King—the Messiah—He will be a Branch that will bear fruit. God didn't create this world to be ruled by bloodshed and survival of the fittest after-all. It's not supposed to be a cruel world, and if we truly work at it.. it won't always be.

But in order to get to this perfect Kingdom, we must first have a Ruler. And that Ruler is, of course, Jesus Christ the Lord! Like a green sprig growing out of a stump we are to provide nourishment for the Jesus Who lives within us. And within our own lives.

May the God of peace fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope and peace by the power of the Holy Spirit. ...In the days ahead, during this Advent Season, we need to do

more than just wait for Christ to be born. We need to stand up and proclaim that peace can be ours. The preparation begins with God's sending of "my messenger" to "prepare the way of the Lord." We are here today because the Lord, Jesus Christ has visited us in this Church every week and has taught us to love one another, have hope and strive for peace.. it is on the way. We just need to remember that Jesus came as the Prince of Peace. Amen ...