

## Isaiah 11:1-10

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

<sup>2</sup>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— <sup>3</sup>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; <sup>4</sup>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.

<sup>5</sup>Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

<sup>6</sup>The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling<sup>Ⓜ</sup> together; and a little child will lead them. <sup>7</sup>The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

<sup>8</sup>The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

<sup>9</sup>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.

<sup>10</sup>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.

**Isaiah 11**, this is the stuff! Hear this, at any time of year, and if you've been to enough carol services, then this transports you straight into that mood of happy expectation. I hear that opening line — 'a shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse', and I can smell the mulled wine and hope. Can't you?

But did you notice the peculiarity that bookends this passage? We begin with a *shoot* from the stump of Jesse — surprising life growing from the dead stump of a family tree. But by verse ten we are referring to the same person as the *root* of Jesse: the one from whom Jesse himself grew. And this is the same person! Of course this is no mystery to us. But imagine the mystery to those hearing Isaiah of Jerusalem! Isn't he a bit confused? He also has no understanding of animals does he! Wolves and lambs living alongside one another? Leopards and goats? Lions eating straw with oxen?

This got me quite confused when I was a kid — I struggled to read the poetry as poetry. We perhaps prefer our hopes more concrete. Isaiah might be saying that on that day no thief will take the food from a hungry child, no woman will feel the least fear walking along a street alone at night, no tenant will fear eviction, no immigrant will fear expulsion — and there will be no more asylum seekers for there will be no need to flee any situation in any country, anywhere.

That's the gist of Isaiah's poetry. Exciting, wonderful, anticipatory stuff, right? Stuff to make you cry out 'alleluia!' and whoop with joy. But let's be realistic — stuff that we're *still* waiting for. Because here, as so often, Isaiah foresees the bringer of this peace, and conflates his coming with the finalisation, the completion of that peacemaking process. He concertinas together the coming messiah, the coming special one of God, with his *second* coming.

It is as if we're were opening a novel, and the first page says 'boy meets girl' and then we flick to the end and read 'they lived happily ever after, the end.'

Of course if you were really about to read that book, shame on you! You missed all the good stuff that builds your love for the characters, while they build their love for each other.

But Isaiah's situation is not that of one reading a novel. He speaks to people who have lost their way and staring catastrophe in the face. They need to know — 'God has not abandoned you, God will send help, there is hope, it will end well!'

Nebuchadnezzar may not be on *our* doorstep with his armies, but we too need hope and inspiration. We find it here, in a passage written roughly seven hundred years before Jesus. We find it in the other moments of advent and the Christmas story.

God is with us — reigning with love and justice, and promising more of the same, for the earth *will* be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

**Amen. SDG.**

**Next Sunday 11<sup>th</sup>**

**croissants@church** 9.30am for 10am Informal Worship

**Samphire** Female Voice Ensemble Concert 4pm £10 on the door and seasonal refreshments

**Sunday 18<sup>th</sup>**

**Holy Communion Service** 9.30am

**Carols by Candlelight** 4pm with the Samphire Singers and more seasonal refreshments