

"There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And 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 the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins. The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fatted calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious."

Dear Friends in Christ, and fellow redeemed:

Who knows what tomorrow will bring? Around noon on August 24, 79 AD, a huge eruption from Mount Vesuvius showered volcanic debris over the city of Pompeii, followed the next day by clouds of blisteringly hot gases. Buildings were destroyed, the population was crushed or asphyxiated, and the city was buried beneath a blanket of ash and pumice.

On Boxing Day in 2004, around 8:00 am local time, an earthquake struck off the west coast of northern Sumatra, Indonesia. The undersea megathrust earthquake caused a massive tsunami with waves up to 30 m (100 ft) high, and devastated communities along the surrounding coasts of the Indian Ocean, killing an estimated 227,898 people in 14 countries, especially in Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India and Thailand. It is the deadliest tsunami in history, the deadliest natural disaster of the 21st century, and one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history.

At the end of November of this year, a massive fire erupted in a Hong Kong high rise housing estate. At least 159 people have died with many more injured. The buildings—something similar to our nearby University District—had 2,000 residential units, thus leaving many families homeless.

Whether it is a major disaster or a small event in our lives, we can find any number of examples of how life can change in an instant. Senseless violence takes the life of a loved one. A tragic accident destroys a family. Without warning we find ourselves unemployed. The list goes on and on. Who knows what tomorrow will bring?

In contrast to the uncertainty and struggles that we experience in this world, what a joy it is to hear the prophet Isaiah speak of a day when all the pain and sorrow that sin has brought upon our world will come to an end. We've been reading the opening chapters of Isaiah in our office devotion. We have already heard the glorious promise that Isaiah made known: ***"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."*** (Isaiah 7:14, ESV) That wonderful name, "Immanuel" means "God with us." God with us! What wonderful hope that gives! Now we hear Isaiah tell us what the God who is with us brings to us. He tells us how wonderful and secure everything will be in His glorious kingdom. When God is with us, we know everything will be glorious. What Isaiah tells us is that it just doesn't get any better than this.

The words of God set before us this day are among the most hopeful and encouraging words of all Scripture. In the beautiful poetry and imagery of our text we are given every reason to hope for a good and blessed future, because the Saviour comes to set things right as He helps and saves His people.

When Isaiah spoke the words of prophecy that are our text today, he spoke them to a people who, like us, needed some hope for the future. The glorious days that Israel and Judah enjoyed under King David were long past. Many evil rulers had led the people away from the one true God and in doing so had brought the kingdom to ruin. Now Isaiah proclaimed that God had judged the people of Judah for their sins and that they would be taken captive by the nation of Assyria. Their beautiful capital would be destroyed. The axe of God's judgment would cut the house of David down to a stump.

But even as God dealt with the sinfulness of His people, He did not leave them without hope. Even when it seemed that things were at their worst, God did not abandon His people. He promised them a better day, a time when things would be better than

they had ever been. That day would come when the One of whom the prophets had foretold; when the Branch of Jesse, the perfect King shall come forth from the family of David. He will have perfect wisdom and understanding, perfect counsel and strength, perfect knowledge of God. ***He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.*** He will truly bring about the golden age that people hope for and long to see. When He comes, well things just can't get any better than that.

And do we not long for that kind of tomorrow? When we take stock of the world that we live in we see the terrible effects of sin at work all around us and in us. We see how the perfection of God's creation has been destroyed. We feel it in every pain and trouble that affects us in our own lives. We see it in the hatred and cruelty of people, of nation against nation. We see it in the problems that plague our country; we see it when the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. Let us not forget that we are part of this. We hate, we covet, we lie and cheat. We look to ourselves and not the good of others. Do we not long for someone who can make things better? What God tells us through the prophet Isaiah is that this king is coming—and what a day it will be when this King comes in all His glory! In the musical, Fiddler on the Roof, there is a song entitled, When Messiah Comes. The song expresses the longings and hopes of the Jewish people, who are scattered all over the world, and persecuted by almost every nation. It also expresses the hope and confidence of this prophecy of Isaiah. "When Messiah comes, he will say to us, I apologize that I took so long, but I had a little trouble finding you, over here a few and over there a few. You were hard to reunite, but everything is going to be all right." That, my dear people, loved by God is what we want. We want everything to be all right.

Isaiah doesn't simply say that everything is going to be all right. He declares that when the Messiah comes things will be wonderful! Isaiah speaks of the glorious things that will happen under His rule: ***The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fatted calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*** The paradise that was lost when Adam and Eve sinned will be restored. Every discordant note, every element of danger and disaster is removed. One-time enemies live together in perfect harmony. He brings peace to all men, and even between men and animals. Even one of mankind's deadly enemies, the cobra, is so changed that a child could put his hand in the den of a poisonous viper without fear. The Saviour takes us back to the way things were in the beginning, in the garden of Eden. He takes us beyond that into the full glories of the kingdom as it was meant to be. As Isaiah says, It just doesn't get any better than this!

In this Advent season, we rejoice that God has planned this great and glorious day for the people of the world. And yet, this great day comes in a very different way than we might first expect. All the glories of that day have their beginning in the event we shall celebrate so soon, namely the birth of a very special Child, the Christ child. Jesus comes into our world to put an end to the damning effects of sin. He came to bring perfect peace to all creation. And He does that as He lives the sinless life we cannot live and offers Himself as a perfect, holy sacrifice for sin. He dies and rises again so that we who are sinful people might be set free from sin. He brings the forgiveness we need, the forgiveness which brings peace between God and men. And in that forgiveness we have the sure and certain hope of a better day, a day when He will come again in glory to take those who trust in Him to the joys of His everlasting kingdom. Truly, it just doesn't get any better than that.

Since Adam and Eve first lost the joy and perfection of paradise, condemning this world to suffer the damning effects of sin, people have hoped and prayed for things to get better. And there have been good times and bad times for our world. Even in the best of times there is always room for improvement and so our world is waiting; waiting for that better day. God promises that day is coming. It is coming through the child of Mary, who has set us free from sin, death and the devil. It is coming as He soon returns in glory to claim His rightful kingdom. As Isaiah said in our text: ***In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.***

Soon, so very soon, this wonderful, perfect King will come to deliver His world and to set things right forever. He will come and bring perfect, everlasting peace. He will come and bring an end to fear and pain and worry. His day is coming and how blessed we are to know that it just doesn't get any better than this! Amen.