

Communion Antiphon † Baruch 5:5, 4:36

Jerusalem, arise and stand upon the heights, and behold the joy which comes to you from God.

Reflection by Dr Michael Barber from <http://www.thesacredpage.com/2013/12/he-will-baptize-with-fire-readings-for.html#more>

*On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.*

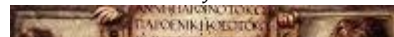
Here we have a prophecy that played a pivotal role in the development of Israel's messianic hopes. While the term "messiah" is not specifically used, ancient Jews clearly linked this passage to such expectations (cf. 1 Enoch 49:3, which links the passage to the Danielic "son of man"; cf. also later rabbinic tradition, Gen. Rab. 97; Ruth Rab. 8:2). Many of the themes that appear were clearly associated with the messianic age (e.g., the age of justice, the inclusion of Gentiles, etc.)

Specifically, the prophecy here alludes to the apparent non-fulfillment of God's promise to David. Let me explain.

However, Isaiah doesn't see a *tree* of Jesse but a *stump*. In other words, the line of David seemed to have come to end. This was the situation Israel found itself in after the fall of the Davidic kingdom in the sixth century B.C. God had promised that a descendant of David--someone from the line of Jesse!--would reign over a kingdom... that promise seemed to have failed.

Thus, the tree of Jesse now appeared to be a "stump"; the tree had been "cut down". Yet Isaiah envisions a shoot coming, apparently miraculously, out of the stump; the line of David had not in fact come to an end. There is hope! A future king will come. The prophetic literature therefore sometimes refers to the Messiah as "the Branch" (cf. Jer. 23:5).

Incidentally, many scholars think this helps to explain an enigmatic passage in Matthew's Gospel. "And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, 'He shall be called a Nazarene'" (Matt 1:23). The problem here is this: there is no prophecy that states, "He shall be called a Nazarene". Why does Matthew say this? Probably because "Nazareth" etymologically related to the Hebrew word "branch" (netser). "Nazareth" is, essentially, "Branch Town". Because Jesus was from Nazareth, Jesus was a "Nazarene", i.e., "a Branch".

**Entrance Antiphon † Cf. Isaiah 30:19, 30.**

O people of Sion, behold, the Lord will come to save the nations, and the Lord will make the glory of his voice heard in the joy of your heart.



The Preaching of St John the Baptist, Pieter Bruegel the Elder 1566, oil on panel, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary.

First Reading † Isaiah 11:1-10

He judges the poor with justice.

A shoot springs from the stock of Jesse,
a scion thrusts from his roots:
on him the spirit of the Lord rests,
a spirit of wisdom and insight,
a spirit of counsel and power,
a spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.
(The fear of the Lord is his breath.)
He does not judge by appearances,
he gives no verdict on hearsay,

but judges the wretched with integrity,
 and with equity gives a verdict for the poor of the land.
 His word is a rod that strikes the ruthless;
 his sentences bring death to the wicked.
 Integrity is the loincloth round his waist,
 faithfulness the belt about his hips.
 The wolf lives with the lamb,
 the panther lies down with the kid,
 calf and lion cub feed together with a little boy to lead them.
 The cow and the bear make friends,
 their young lie down together.
 The lion eats straw like the ox.
 The infant plays over the cobra's hole;
 into the viper's lair the young child puts his hand.
 They do no hurt, no harm, on all my holy mountain,
 for the country is filled with the knowledge of the Lord
 as the waters swell the sea.
 That day, the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples.
 It will be sought out by the nations and its home will be glorious.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm † Psalm 71:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17.

R. Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace for ever.

O God, give your judgement to the king,
 to a king's son your justice,
 that he may judge your people in justice
 and your poor in right judgement. **R.**

In his days justice shall flourish
 and peace till the moon fails:
 He shall rule from sea to sea,
 from the Great River to earth's bounds. **R.**

For he shall save the poor when they cry
 and the needy who are helpless.
 He will have pity on the weak
 and save the lives of the poor. **R.**

May his name be blessed for ever
 and endure like the sun.
 Every tribe shall be blessed in him,
 all nations bless his name. **R.**

Second Reading † Romans 15:4-9

Christ, the hope of all people.

Everything that was written long ago in the scriptures was meant to teach us something about hope from the examples scripture gives of how people who did not give up were helped by God. And may he who helps us when we refuse to give up, help you all to be tolerant with each other, following the example of Christ Jesus, so that united in mind and voice you may give glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It can only be to God's glory, then, for you to treat each other in the same friendly way as Christ treated you. The reason Christ became the servant of circumcised Jews was not only so that God could faithfully carry out the promises made to the patriarchs, it was also to get the pagans to give glory to God for his mercy, as scripture says in one place: For this I shall praise you among the pagans and sing your name.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Gospel Acclamation † Luke 3:4, 6.

Alleluia, alleluia!

Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths:
 all people shall see the salvation of God.

Alleluia!

Gospel † Matthew 3:1-12

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.

In due course John the Baptist appeared; he preached in the wilderness of Judaea and this was his message: 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is close at hand.'

This was the man the prophet spoke of when he said:

A voice cries in the wilderness:
 Prepare a way for the Lord,
 make his paths straight.

This man John wore a garment made of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole Jordan district made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. But when he saw a number of Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, 'Brood of vipers, who warned you to fly from the retribution that is coming? But if you are repentant, produce the appropriate fruit, and do not presume to tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father," because, I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is laid to the roots of the trees, so that any tree which fails to produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you in water for repentance, but the one who follows me is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into the barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that will never go out.'

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!**