

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Midweek Advent 1
December 1, 2021
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
Jesus of Nazareth is our King.

A shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit.

² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him:

the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ He will be delighted with the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, nor will he render decisions based on what he hears with his ears, ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the poor, and he will render fair decisions in favor of the oppressed on the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath from his lips he will put the wicked to death.

⁵ Righteousness will be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his hips. ⁶ The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, the calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together, and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear will graze together, and their young ones will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the cattle. ⁸ The nursing child will play near a cobra's hole, and the weaned child will put his hand into a viper's den. ⁹ They will not hurt or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ This is what will take place on that day. The peoples will seek the Root of Jesse, who will be standing like a banner for the peoples, and his resting place will be glorious.

¹¹ On that day the LORD will reach out his hand for the second time to reclaim the remnant of this people who survive from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coasts of the sea.

—Isaiah 11:1-11

During our midweek Advent services this year, we are going to walk with Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem and make a stop at Jerusalem along the way. This was not a trip that the two of them made 2000 years ago because they needed a vacation. It was a trip of about 90 miles. Mary was nine months pregnant. She either had to walk on her own or ride on some animal to travel the distance. They would have faced danger, wild animals, and challenges along the way. Mary was ready to give birth to a child at any moment. Their travels would have been slow going. A lot of stops along the way. Have you ever thought about what Joseph and Mary were thinking about as they made that journey? What were they pondering?

Certainly they would have been praying about and thinking about the safety and welfare of Mary and the baby she was carrying. I'm sure Joseph was constantly asking Mary if she was okay. "Mary, do you want to stop? Do you need a rest?" He certainly would have been thinking about her safety along the journey. But I wonder if they might have also been thinking about the prophetic promises that pointed to these moments.

You see, Mary and Joseph lived in Nazareth. That's where their home was. It was in the north in the region of Galilee. Mary and Joseph could look out their window, 1300 feet above sea level, and they could reminisce of great battles that were won by the Lord. They could look down in the valley and picture Gideon's army of 300 defeating the Midianite army of 120,000. Joseph and Mary could envision Elijah standing before the 450 false Baal prophets as they had the showdown between God and the false god of Baal. God showed his power with fire coming down from heaven to burn up a sacrifice.

The area around Nazareth had seen some astounding displays of God's power and might over the years. But when Mary and Joseph lived there, it wasn't very impressive. Years later, Nathanael would exclaim what was felt by many people, **"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"**

Nazareth was some Podunk town that was not very special. It was looked down upon by people. It was a small town of around 150 people. It didn't look impressive at all. But a significant family lived in Nazareth. It was home to Joseph and Mary. And Joseph and Mary both could trace their ancestry back to King David.

This is not a myth. This is not just a story. This is not just some fairy tale that is pulled out of thin air. These are real people who are really connected to each other, who lived in real places with real circumstances. And the simple journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem reveals that truth. Mary and Joseph knew their family history. They could trace their family lineage to a man named Jesse.

Now Jesse lived a thousand years before Joseph and Mary. His home was in the area of Bethlehem in the south. He was a lowly shepherd. He had a number of sons and his youngest son was David. As a boy David wasn't anything special. He was a humble shepherd. When his brothers would go to fight in a war, David stayed back and tended the flocks.

But God had plans for David. When David became a man, God made him to be king over the nation of Israel. Under David's kingship the nation of Israel flourished and was powerful. Even though David's hometown was Bethlehem, David lived in the capital city of Jerusalem. He had his palace. Under his kingship, the nation had peace. It had security. God blessed his people under the kingship of David. And for quite a few years the people saw that prosperity and peace from David and his son Solomon, who succeeded him as king.

But then the kings of Israel became arrogant. They didn't seek after God. They wanted to do their own thing. A civil war broke out in the unified kingdom of Israel. The kingdom was split in two. The northern kingdom was called Israel, sometimes referred to as Ephraim. And the southern kingdom was called Judah. When that split happened in the nation, two lines of kings ruled - one in the north and one in the south. All the kings of the north were evil; every single one of them. The southern kingdom of Judah saw some good kings and some evil kings.

For years God's people had been practically inviting God to bring his judgment on them. They sinned against him again and again. The arrogance stuck to the people and the kings like clothes stick to a sweaty body. It was disgusting.

Well, God sent the prophet Isaiah to announce to the people that God was about ready to take them up on their invitation and to bring his judgment against them. Isaiah looked to the north. He looked to the kingdom of Israel, and he saw the Assyrian army invading the northern tribe of Israel and hauling them off into captivity. The land was devastated as the Assyrians swept through Israel. The Assyrian army replaced the people of Israel with foreigners that they conquered in other countries. Isaiah's lament in chapter 9 had come true. **"God humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali."** That's the land of Nazareth. Gentiles now occupied the land. That happened in 722 BC.

But God equipped Isaiah to look into the future, and he saw the same thing happening with the southern tribe of Judah. God's ax was at the base of the tree ready to bring his judgment on the proud line of Judah. 110 years after the northern nation of Israel was destroyed, God's ax cut down the southern nation of Judah as the Babylonians took Judah's finest into captivity. 30 years later they would return and completely destroy Jerusalem; its temple, its palace, its people.

If you looked at the strong, mighty family tree of David, all that was left were stumps. Oh, the royal line would continue. It had to because God promised that a Savior would come from that line. But it was not a prestigious, powerful kingdom. David's line did not look glorious. It did not look kingly. The royal line was diminished to a stump – its majesty only a dim memory; its power only a collection of stories of past victories.

The land was devastated. But God made a promise. He was going to keep his promise. So after 70 years of exile in Babylon, he brought back a remnant to Palestine. Many of the exiles who were living in Babylon and later Persia returned to Israel. And it's likely that a whole clan of the line of David, from the exiled tribe of Judah, returned from Babylon and Persia about 100 BC. As they came across the Fertile Crescent and made their way into Palestine, it's likely that the family line of David stopped in the north at Galilee. They set up home in the town of Nazareth. Mary and Joseph's ancestors lived there. It was a family town. Their family tree was established in this small town.

The once powerful family tree of David was reduced to what appeared to be stumps. Family stumps living in the Podunk town of Nazareth. Joseph was a humble carpenter. Mary was a teenage girl. But 750 years earlier, Isaiah saw a change that would happen. Something was going to change for this royal lineage. A shoot was going to grow from that lineage. Isaiah saw it, **"A shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit."** But Jesse was from Bethlehem. The little shoot would come from that small village. It would start in Bethlehem, but it would grow into a Branch somewhere else. A Branch was coming. Isaiah saw it. Interestingly enough, the Hebrew word for Branch is "Netzer." Sound familiar?

750 years before, through the pen of Isaiah, God was laying down the clues. The royal line of David was going to be established. But the kingdom that was coming would far surpass David's kingdom. The Branch was coming from Mary. God made it happen in a way that no human being could make happen. A virgin was pregnant with a child. Nine months earlier, the angel Gabriel came to Mary and explained what all this would mean. **"Do not be afraid, Mary, because you have found favor with God. Listen, you will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."**

Oh, that King would not come from the powerful city of Jerusalem. He wouldn't be born in a palace. The lineage of David was not on the throne. That was a past era. No, the Romans were ruling the land now. That royal line from David looked so dead. It was a stump.

But from the stump came a Branch, a Netzer. God gave all the clues. He didn't want anybody to miss this Branch. Mary and Joseph were embarking on a journey. They were traveling 90 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem. Why? Because of a Roman decree, right? Caesar Augustus, the king, issued a decree that a census, a counting, should be taken of the entire Roman world. Everybody had to go back to their home town. They needed to go back to the city of their roots. Mary and Joseph were heading to Bethlehem because their roots were from the line of Jesse. They were descendants of David. They left Nazareth in the north to travel to Bethlehem in the south. They did that because they were law-abiding citizens. Mary was nine months pregnant. But they left because of the law.

But the picture is bigger than that. The journey has a better purpose. This was designed by God. The shoot would come from Bethlehem. But he would grow into a Branch, a Netzer, in Nazareth. His name is Jesus. He would be distinguished from any other person named Jesus, or Yeshua, in the land. God wanted the world to know this person. Pilate years later would express more than he knew when he wrote on the piece of paper above the cross, **“Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”**

He certainly is a King, but his kingdom is not of this world. He is a King who brings blessings that are greater than any other kingdom in this world. He is a Branch that produces fruit that will last.

Just look at some of that fruit. Isaiah saw it. **“The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, the calf, the young lion, and the fattened calf together, and a little child will lead them. ⁷The cow and the bear will graze together, and their young ones will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the cattle. ⁸The nursing child will play near a cobra’s hole, and the weaned child will put his hand into a viper’s den. ⁹They will not hurt or destroy anywhere on my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”**

What is Isaiah seeing? Oh, hostility was all around. Spiritual warfare spread throughout the entire world. But Isaiah saw peace coming from this King.

How would you describe peace? This is how Isaiah describes it. As Isaiah looks out across the land, he envisions the wolf and lamb snuggling together. He sees the leopard and the goat hanging out together. A lion cuddles up with a fattened calf. And child who cannot defend himself against a viper has nothing to fear around the nest. It was a picture. Isaiah gave a picture of this King’s rule. He gave a picture of the Branch’s fruit. Peace would come through this King.

This King has given you peace. The warfare that sin causes, the hellish captivity that sin deserves, it would all be gone. The result would be peace. Peace between God and his people. Was God angry because of sin? He’s not angry anymore. Was God ready to leave us for dead? He changes us from death to life. How? Through a Branch. A Branch that gives us life. “Jesus of Nazareth is our King.”

And the fruits of this Branch extend farther than Nazareth. Isaiah saw it. **“This is what will take place on that day. The peoples will seek the Root of Jesse, who will be standing like a banner for the peoples, and his resting place will be glorious.”** God knocks down the barriers. God makes the path clear. He brings the mountains low and fills in the valleys. He removes all obstacles so that we, who are living 2000 years after this Branch came, can clearly see him standing as the victorious King. He went through death so that we would have life. He lives and rules over all so that we know him as our Savior. We know who he is. This is Jesus of Nazareth, our King.

And because of Jesus, we too can trace our family tree. We are one of the branches on this grand and glorious tree. We are a part of God’s family tree.

Do you know what that means? It means that as you wait, as you watch, as you prepare for his glorious return on the Last Day, you have nothing to fear. It means that the enemies who regularly surround you, Satan the lion who stalks you, the sinful nature that betrays you, the sinful world that degrades you, those enemies do not have the last say. The King does; Christ our King does. It means you are safe with him and are honored as members of his kingdom. Being a part of God’s family tree means that we can pray, **“O Savior, Child of Mary, Who felt our human woes, O Savior, King of glory, Who conquered all our foes, Bring us at last, we pray, To the bright courts of heaven And to the endless day.”** Look for the clues, my friends. They are in God’s text. Believe them. Treasure them. Jesus of Nazareth is your eternal King, and you are in his kingdom. Amen.