

Sunday, December 8, 2019

Second Sunday of Advent

Meditation and Questions for Reflection or Group Discussion

Mass Readings:

1st Reading: Isaiah 11:1-10

Responsorial: Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17

2nd Reading: Romans 15:4-9

Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12

Advent, A Season of Prophecies Being Fulfilled

A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse. (Isaiah 11:1)

Have you ever seen a Jesse Tree? It's an ancient Advent tradition consisting of a carving, painting, or stained-glass window—even an actual tree—that portrays the people, prophecies, and events leading up to the birth of the Messiah. Jesus is usually at the top. Many medieval Jesse Trees also included a depiction of Jesse himself lying at the base of the tree. That's because the design comes from today's first reading: a shoot sprouting "from the stump of Jesse" (Isaiah 11:1).

Jesse was the father of King David and an ancestor of Jesus, so the branches of the Jesse Tree are meant to display Jesus' rich and varied heritage. The Tree reminds us how faithful God was during the "long Advent" when his people waited for the Messiah. Each person and event represented on the tree depicts part of God's plan to save his people. Prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah often show up. So do David, Solomon, and other kings, as well as virtuous women like Ruth, Esther, and Susanna.

Even if you don't decorate a Jesse Tree in your home, the ideas behind it can help you prepare for Christmas. During Advent, it's traditional to review stories from the Old Testament that promise the coming of the Messiah. Stories of these ancestors of Jesus illustrate God's commitment to his plan to save us. It's a commitment that stretched from the very beginning, through thousands of years, right up to Christmas Day. It's a commitment too that reaches even to the present.

Jesus' birth has brought about something new and wonderful, and the Jesse Tree illustrates it: a salvation that is far more wide-reaching than we ever could have imagined.

"Heavenly Father, thank you for your faithfulness to your promises! Thank you for making me a part of your family."

(Many thanks to [The Word Among Us](http://www.wau.org) (www.wau.org) for allowing us to use meditations from their monthly devotional magazine. Used with permission.)

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Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. The first reading begins with these words: *On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, but he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted.*
 - The first reading is a prophecy regarding a new Davidic king who will establish a new kingdom. In what ways has Jesus fulfilled these prophetic words?
 - The seven gifts of the Spirit are also mentioned. How has Jesus, the perfect man, received the fullness of the Spirit and these spiritual gifts? In what ways are these gifts intended for you, as well as for all Christians?
 - Are you open to praying for yourself and others during Advent to receive a deeper infilling of the Holy Spirit and a greater manifestation of his gifts? If not, why not?
2. The responsorial psalm also speaks of a king, and the king's son, who "*shall govern your people with justice and your afflicted ones with judgment.*" Similar to the first reading, it goes on to say that "*he shall rescue the poor when he cries out, and the afflicted when he has no one to help him. He shall have pity for the lowly and the poor; the lives of the poor he shall save. Justice shall flower in his days, and profound peace, till the moon be no more.*"
 - As a disciple of Christ, and a citizen of his kingdom, what steps can you take this Advent to *rescue the poor when he cries out, and the afflicted when he has no one to help him... have pity for the lowly and the poor?*
 - An important attribute of this king's kingdom is that *Justice shall flower in his days, and profound peace* will be the *justice.* How can you make *justice* a greater part of your relationships with God and others??
3. The second reading opens with these words: *Brothers and sisters: Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.* It continues with these words: *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God.*
 - In the opening words, St. Paul tells of the value of the Scriptures in our lives. How often do you turn to the Scriptures for *encouragement* and *hope* as he suggests?
 - What steps can you take during Advent to increase the time you spend reading Scripture.
 - St. Paul also prays for Christians to have greater unity and *harmony with one another.* How can you be a greater source of unity during Advent in your family -- and with Christians of other denominations, and non-Christians?
4. The Gospel reading begins with these words of John the Baptist: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!*" He goes on to say these words to the Pharisees and Sadducees: "*You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.*" The reading continues with these words of John the Baptist: *I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.*
 - What message do you think John the Baptist was trying to convey with his opening words?
 - He also tells the Pharisees and Sadducee to *Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance.* Why is this an important part of his message to them, and to us? What are the fruits the Lord is asking you to bear in your life?
 - What do you think these words mean: *He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire?* As you open yourself to a deeper infilling of the Holy Spirit, what new steps during Advent can you take to *Produce good fruit?*
5. The meditation opens by describing the "ancient tradition" of the "Jesse Tree" that "portrays the people, prophecies, and events leading up to the birth of the Messiah." It ends with these words: "Jesus' birth has brought about something new and wonderful, and the Jesse Tree illustrates it: a salvation that is far more wide-reaching than we ever could have imagined."
 - How would you describe the "people, prophecies, and events leading up to the birth of the Messiah"?
 - The meditation also tells us that "Jesus' birth has brought about something new and wonderful." What are some of these "new and wonderful" things?

Take some time now to pray and thank our Heavenly Father for his faithfulness, and for making us his beloved sons and daughters through our Lord Jesus Christ. Use the prayer below from the meditation as a starting point.

"Heavenly Father, thank you for your faithfulness to your promises! Thank you for making me a part of your family."

[The discussion questions were created by Maurice Blumberg, who is currently a member of the board of directors of the ChristLife Catholic Ministry for Evangelization (www.christlife.org), a member of the National Service Committee Council of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal (www.nsc-chariscenter.org), and a board member of The Love of Christ Foundation. Prior to this, Maurice was the founding executive director of the National fellowship of Catholic Men, a chairman of the board of *The Word Among Us* (www.wau.org), and a director of partner relations for *The Word Among Us Partners* ministry.]