

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church – Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Midweek Advent 2
December 11, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Christopher Pflughoeft
Oh Christmas tree, how lovely is your brand!

¹A shoot will spring up from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots will bear fruit. ²The 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. ³He 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, ⁴but 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. ⁵Righteousness will be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his hips. ⁶The 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. ¹⁰This 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.

– Isaiah 11:1-10 EHV

“Oh Christmas tree, Oh Christmas tree, How lovely are you branches!” My guess is that you know this song fairly well. Perhaps you do not completely know the lyrics, but you have a comfortability with the tune. This song also goes by the title, “O Tannenbaum.” The song originally praised the steadfastness of the evergreen tree. However, as the song evolved it became more related to the Christmas tree.

“Oh Christmas tree, how lovely are your branches!” Although this song is a song of adoration toward the Christmas tree that is beautifully adorned for the holiday celebration, we are going to repurpose the lyrics tonight.

Tonight, we learn of a different and more beautiful branch of the Christmas tree. This is the branch that sprouts from the stump of Jesse in Isaiah 11. Through this lesson, we will marvel at the beauty of this Christmas tree in what it produces for us now and throughout eternity. In response, we will burst out in song, “Oh Christmas tree, how lovely is your branch!”

Let us put this reading into context. The LORD had a promise for Israel and all people amidst the words of impending destruction. The LORD of armies would work through Assyria to level the forest of trees. Yet, out of that a sprout would come from the stump of Jesse. A sprout of hope amidst destruction. The sprout of hope would be this promised branch.

Who is this branch of the Christmas tree? Our text for consideration today gives us some indications to answer that question. The Branch comes from the stump of Jesse. Jesse is the father of the famous king, King David. Therefore, we are looking for one who comes from this lineage. Matthew 1:5 and following show that Jesus comes from this lineage.

Another indication that we must look for is we need to see one on whom the Spirit of the LORD rested. This was stated here in Isaiah 11. This is also an indicator of this individual being the Messiah, the anointed one. He would be anointed by the Holy Spirit. You can look forward to Matthew 3:16 in which the account of Jesus' baptism shows that this indicator fits Jesus as well.

The final indicator of who this branch is looks forward to what is yet to come on Judgment Day. On that day, he will be the Judge. Jesus is the Judge. Jesus is this branch. This is as it is written in 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he did while in the body, whether good or bad." (EHV) Now, this shows us that Jesus' judgment will not be as humans will judge. His judgement will not be based on what he sees and hears, but on his righteousness. On that day, those who are covered with Jesus' righteousness will receive the wonderful proclamation of "Well done, good and faithful servant." and "Come, join me in my everlasting kingdom."

The indicators in this text show us that the branch is Jesus. It is also interesting to note that this branch sprouts from the stump of Jesse, yet it is also the root of Jesus. How can the branch also be the root? Well, Jesus is truly man from the lineage of David, but he is also the God of the universe. This is as it is written about the Son of God, "Through him everything was made, and without him not one thing was made that has been made." (John 1:3 EHV) Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is the branch of Jesse. He is the Son of God. He is the son of David. He is David's son and Lord. "Oh Christmas tree, how lovely is your branch."

We are caused to marvel at the loveliness of the branch because of who he is and what he does. The Scripture upon which we meditate today gives us a glimpse of the promise that comes ultimately from him. This branch produces peace.

The peace that is produced from the branch of Jesse is eternal peace. I have already stated that those who are clothed in his righteousness will be welcomed to be with God forever in paradise. On the Last Day, God will bring all believers of all times in their resurrected bodies to live with him forever in the new earth. Think Garden of Eden restored. Today's reading gives us just a glimpse of this eternal peace.

In our eternal home, there will be no more sin and death. Their consequences will be gone as well. Sadness, fear, and tears will be no more. These wonderful truths are demonstrated by the pictures of peace through animals. Predators and prey will dwell together in unity; the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the goat, the lion and the fattened calf, the bear and the cow, children and snakes. What do these images show us? There will be unimaginable peace in paradise.

The greatest illustration of this peace, however, is not from these images. Instead, the greatest illustration is from the presence of the knowledge of the LORD. The greatest bliss of the eternity of heaven is that there will be communion with God.

The branch of Jesse produces fruit. He produces the fruit of peace. This is eternal peace; the bliss of eternity in paradise with God. This is yours. This comes to you from Christ Jesus. You know what he did. He came on that first Christmas to live as your substitute. He died on the cross to take away the punishment of your sins. He rose from the grave to give you assurance that you too shall live forever. Now, you too can proclaim, "Oh Christmas tree, how lovely is your branch!"

Several times throughout our meditation this evening, I have stated that the promise of peace produced by the branch of Jesse leads us to proclaim, sing out, adore, and glorify our Lord Jesus. Now, I want to consider if this is what your disposition really looks like. We are in week two of December which is primetime Christmas celebration preparation. Do you feel peaceful? Are you celebrating? Are you rejoicing?

Sadly, I do not think this is a time in which many people receive the joy of the branch of Jesse. Sadly, I think many people do not take this as an opportunity to glorify our Lord. Instead, people are focused on the glitter around the tree instead of the branch which is the reason for celebration.

Has your Christmas celebration stopped you from celebrating that the branch produces peace? Consider your current schedule and disposition toward what you are doing in the name of celebrating Christmas and what it means for you. Buying gifts for your children. Buying gifts for your children's teachers. Visiting loved ones. Attending parties. Rather than making these opportunities to glorify Jesus for the peace he produces, have these become burdensome to you? Are you doing them out of obligation or guilt?

People of Emmanuel, if your Christmas tree glistens and your rails are wrapped in garland and your little Christmas village has all the pieces of fake snow in the right place, but you are not doing these things to glorify the most important branch of the Christmas tree, then I need to ask you why even do it? Having such a disposition in which the Christmas celebration is a burden is sinful.

So, what do you need to do? Recognize what the issue is. Do you have too much going on in your Christmas celebration? Cut some of it out. Is your heart behind what is causing the problem? Confess that sin to the LORD.

Maybe the forest of destruction looks like a winter wonderland in your life. Still, there is the sprout of hope from the stump of Jesse. This sprout is also the root of Jesse. This is the branch. This is your Savior Jesus. Jesus came to take your sins away. You are forgiven for your sinful disposition toward the Christmas celebration. You are forgiven for all your sins. You also know that this branch judges from a different perspective. Your sins are no longer seen. Your grunts and complaints are not heard. You are not guilty. All the promises of eternal peace in paradise are for you. You will live with your God forever in the new heavens and new earth.

Let this truth of the disposition of joy in response to the promised peace from the branch of Jesse change our approach to Christmas celebrations. Maybe, this will cause you to say no to some of the activities. You may think "Buying this gift is distracting me from glorifying Jesus... Going to this party is distracting me from giving God thanks... Holding on to this tradition may stop me from receiving his peace," then you will let these things go. Maybe you can and should retain such activities and you just need to change your approach to them. Start off the friendly Christmas gathering with a reading from Luke 2. Switch out the chocolate advent calendar with one that gives your Scripture to read. Make attending the Christmas Eve Candlelight service a part of the family tradition for the holidays.

This Advent and Christmas season let us all join to proclaim together, "Oh Christmas tree, how lovely is your branch!" Jesus is the branch of Jesse. Jesus produces eternal peace for you. This is a reason to celebrate. Amen.