

Advent in Isaiah (Week 1) - The Unbiased King and His Possible Impossible Kingdom  
**Yesterday's Sermon Summary**

1. We're going to be spending Advent this year in the book of Isaiah. Why? As it happens, the Old Testament readings in the lectionary for Advent are from Isaiah. But, more so, Micah and Isaiah are closely tied, and since we just gave serious attention to Micah, maybe we ought to give some time to its bigger brother? Last, when the New Testament writers used the Old Testament to explain and understand Jesus, the three books they used most were Psalms, Isaiah, and Deuteronomy.

2. As we consider these texts in Isaiah, we'll need to ask at least three linked questions: a) what was Isaiah saying and hoping for in his day (600s/700s BCE), b) how did the first Christians see Jesus in this text, and c) why does any of that matter to us today?

3. Our first text in Isaiah is [11.1-10](#). First note that Isaiah hopes for someone on whom God's spirit would come to rest fully (vs. 2). We need to read this in its Old Testament setting and not apply our later Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. In the O.T., God's "spirit" is God's life, breath, and animus (e.g., it is God's "spirit" that created and brought order out of chaos in [Genesis 1.2](#), and it was God's "spirit" that made the first humans into living creatures ([Gen. 2.7](#)). So Isaiah is hoping for someone who is deeply marked and imbued with God's own life, creativity, and benevolent order.

3. But also remember that in the Old Testament God's spirit is not thought to be poured out on all people (like in the New Testament) but instead specifically on leaders, like kings, priests, and prophets. So when Isaiah is hoping for someone on whom God's spirit rests, he's thinking of a national or religious leader.

4. The first Christians saw in Jesus a person and leader in whom God's spirit was on full display, like was hoped in Isaiah 11.2. For example, Luke's gospel says that at the start of His public ministry, Jesus was "full of God's spirit" ([Luke 4.1](#)). Similarly, Jesus Himself used another text from Isaiah to announce His own ministry in His hometown of Nazareth that declared the "spirit of the Lord" being upon Him ([Luke 4.18](#), which is a citation of Isaiah 61.1).

5. We who are Jesus' followers should seek to be as full of and vibrant with God's spirit as He was, to be marked by God's own life, breath, and creative benevolence. As lofty as they might sound, imitating Jesus is one of the key purposes behind God giving us the spirit in the first place: as the former archbishop of Canterbury William Temple wrote, "It is no good giving me a play like Hamlet or King Lear and telling me to write a play like that. Shakespeare could do it—I can't. And it is no good showing me a life like the life of Jesus and telling me to live a life like that. Jesus could do it—I can't. But if the genius of Shakespeare could come and live in me, then I could write plays like this. And if the Spirit could come into me, then I could live a life like His."

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6. As we move further into Isaiah 11, we get to some extraordinary, well-known verses that describe what seem like an impossibility ([11.6-9](#)): lions and wolves will coexist peacefully with lambs and goats, children will play with poisonous snakes, etc. This is poetic, not literal, language, which is describing a world in which natural adversaries live together, predators forgo their natural aggression, their prey roam unworried and free, and violence is replaced by peace.

7. Isaiah's own setting is not unlike our own, and for both these verses can seem outlandish and far-fetched. We are left to conclude with Paul Simpson Duke, "We recognize something profound in these verses. They signal hope. Wolves play nice with the flock, and lambs can be audacious, unafraid to run with the pack. For the preyed-upon to know peace, the predator must be vigilantly committed to peace. If even animals can override their bloody instincts, then maybe humans can do the same?... Isaiah's declaration stands in direct contrast to the terror and brutality that pervade his world and ours."

8. And, as Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann brings to our attention, the first Christians saw that in, through, and because of Jesus these verses declare what is now an impossible possibility for us. Jesus came to offer and embody the kind of peace and harmony Isaiah describes, a kind seldom seen in our world ([John 14.27](#)). And we who are Jesus' disciples now inherit His mission to bring, make, and be known for peace (e.g., [Matthew 5.9](#), [Romans 12.18](#), and [Colossians 3.15](#)).

9. Dr. Mark Roberts of Fuller Seminary connects the dots between the peace that Isaiah hoped for, the peace God was enacting through Jesus, and our mission as Christians to be extend and engender peace: "Peace is essential to Christianity, of that there can be no doubt, and Christians must surely seek to be peacemakers...The Old Testament word for "peace" is shalom. For Hebrew speakers, shalom has a much richer and fuller significance than the English word "peace." Whereas we sometimes limit the idea of peace to the absence of conflict or violence, shalom includes far more: it comprises notions of wholeness, completeness, soundness, and prosperity...In the Old Testament, peace is also inseparable from righteousness and justice, meaning not only to doing morally correct deeds, but also to living rightly in relationship with others... So upon the occasion of Jesus's birth when angels filled the sky with praise to God and sang, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and PEACE on earth to all whom God favors," we should hear that in Jesus God's shalom was coming the earth...This biblical vision of peace enables us to trust God in the midst of so much brokenness and strife. It also motivates us to be peacemakers, even when our Christian hope for peace seem naive to a jaded, worn out world. Nonetheless, we are bound together as Christians by this steadfast belief in the peace Jesus embodied, taught, and left to us as our mission."

## **Living with Isaiah 11.1-10 this Week**

Here are a few devotionals on Isaiah 11.1-10 to help you keep in mind and heart this week:

- [The Peaceable Kingdom](#)
- [The Invasive Reign of God](#)
- [Protect the Herd](#)
- [Socks and Stove Knobs](#)

Want to explore more about Old Testament shalom/peace, Jesus bringing peace, and our mission as Christians to live in and make peace? Explore some of these pieces from The Center for Action and Contemplation: [You searched for peace](#)

- We didn't cover all the connections between Isaiah 11.1-10 and Jesus in the sermon. Want to check out more, and see a few more insights on the original cultural setting for this text in Isaiah? Try this article - [Commentary on Isaiah 11:1-10 - Working Preacher from Luther Seminary](#)