

Here Comes the Judge!

Isaiah 11:1-9

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St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra's den, the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. (Isa. 11:1-9, NIV)

Dear fellow believers in Jesus, the Son of David, our Savior:

“Here comes the judge!” The announcement makes us sit up and take notice. Whether it's a county judge or a Supreme Court Justice, we recognize their authority. Their rulings and verdicts carry weight and are meant to be carried out.

The Lord God spoke through his prophet Isaiah about the coming Savior, that he would come with authority, with powerful and just rulings, and with blessed results. May all take notice and honor him when we hear the prophet announce: **“Here Comes the Judge!”**

The prophet notes the lowly origins of this judge: “A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse.” Jesse of Bethlehem was the father of Israel's greatest king, David, around 1000 B.C. David established a long-running dynasty of kings over Israel and then the southern kingdom of Judah. By the time of Isaiah, just over 700 B.C., it was foretold that the kingdom of Judah would come to an end because of the wickedness and idolatry of the people, including some of those kings. In 586 BC, the axe of God's judgment would cut down the dynasty of David and end the kingdom of Judah. For centuries the people of Judah, known as the Jews, were subjects under other kingdoms and empires: The Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, the Egyptians, the Syrians, and finally the Romans.

But then two descendants of David from the town of Nazareth, Mary and Joseph, both received visits from an angel announcing they would have a child (though Mary was a virgin)—a son who would be called “the Son of the Most High.” Gabriel told Mary: “The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:32b,33). By a miracle, Jesus, the Son of God, was born of Mary. From these lowly origins, like a shoot from a dead stump, Jesus grew up, as a “Branch” that bore fruit. Jesus would rule and judge the earth—with righteousness and faithfulness.

Isaiah's prophecy tells us how the LORD would equip him for his rule: “The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him.” Right away we think of the time the 30-year-old Jesus was baptized, and the

Spirit of God descended on him in the form of a dove. That was the Father's anointing of his Son, giving him the Spirit that is described here as "the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD." A whole sermon could be spoken about that description of the Spirit! Alas, time does not permit me to go into detail. It is enough for us to know that Jesus was properly equipped with the Spirit, and he delighted in the fear of the LORD to carry out his calling with righteousness.

"He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears." Jesus isn't like a judge who judges people by the way they look ("I don't like the looks of that person, he seems guilty to me"), or by their skin color or ethnicity. Jesus doesn't make snap decisions based on hearsay. No, Jesus rules "with righteousness" and "with justice," in a fair way for the needy and the poor. He also judges absolutely fairly when it comes to the wicked, striking the earth "with the rod of his mouth," and slaying the wicked "with the breath of his lips," which is his Word, the message of God's law and judgment. Jesus as judge will give what the poor need—relief—and what the wicked deserve—eternal condemnation.

Hearing this, how do we respond when the cry goes out, "Here comes the Judge!" We know how sinful we are; will the Judge come to slay us and condemn us to hell? Before he comes, we need to humble ourselves and confess our sinfulness. We admit how poor we are—poor in spirit, spiritually poor and being in sin. Have no fear! Jesus comes with righteousness and gives his righteousness to us, while he suffered the penalty for our sins. How blessed that day will be when the Judge comes and he issues the verdict: "You're not guilty! For I paid for your sins when I died on the cross, and you are covered with my righteousness and holiness. I will take you into heaven!"

This is why we rejoice with the apostle Paul, who wrote, "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Ro. 8:1), who believe in him. Both Paul and Isaiah tell us the blessed result of Jesus' righteous rule and verdict. Paul wrote, "Therefore, since we have been justified [declared not guilty] through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ro. 5:1). Peace! The angels sang of it when Jesus was born: "Peace on earth!" (Lk. 2:14). And here in our text, Isaiah beautifully describes that peace as serene harmony in the animal kingdom, between predator and prey: "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat" and so forth. Can you imagine, a child putting its hand into a viper's hole—and suffers no harm? Jesus comes with his righteous rule to bring about such a perfect peace.

We might think, "Such a peace cannot possibly exist, at least not in this world." Yet, the seed of this peace is here already. When Jesus died for the sins of the world, there is now peace between us and God. Sins are forgiven. And God wants this peace to be broadcast to all the world, to spread this gospel of peace. When we live by faith in this gospel, we learn to live at peace with one another and forgive one another.

But one day, when the stars fall out of the sky and a trumpet blast sounds, and the archangel cries out, "Here comes the Judge!", the world will see that perfect peace. All wickedness and sin, all hurt and death, will be banished to hell. "They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." No more harmful animals or wicked people, just perfect peace, harmony and joy will exist forever.

"Here comes the Judge!" Jesus, come to our hearts now, rule with your gospel of righteousness, and grant us your peace. Amen.