

Second Sunday of Advent
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Isaiah 11:1-10

Isaiah of Jerusalem functioned as a court prophet from “the year that King Uzziah died” (6:1; 742 BCE) until after Sennacherib’s unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem (701 BCE). The setting of his call to prophetic ministry (6:1-13) suggests that he may also have served as a priest. Dating Isaiah 11:1-10 has always presented peculiar challenges. The reference to the “stump of Jesse” in 11:1 could be a reference to the ending of the Davidic kingship by the Babylonians in 586 BCE; but not all scholars agree, for 11:1-5 reads very much like a royal psalm from before the exile. The vision of the “peaceable kingdom” in 11:6-9 resembles post-exilic visions like Habakkuk 2:14 and Isaiah 65:25 and we should date Isaiah 11:1-10 with them. This hymn and Isaiah 9:2-7 both express cogently the messianic idealism associated with Judah’s institution of kingship. The lectionary adds verse 10 to the reading, but that verse belongs with what follows.

Psalms 72:1-7, 18-19

This *royal psalm* was either a coronation hymn or a hymn sung in commemoration of the king’s coronation. The late ascription “To Solomon” in the first verse of the Hebrew text (not reproduced in the *BCP*) lacks adequate explanation since Solomon never engaged in warfare. “The River” (72:8) refers to the Euphrates River. The Phoenicians founded *Tarshish* (72:10) as a copper smelter on the SW coast of Spain. *Sheba* designates a region in southern Arabia, and *Seba* probably refers to a site in Ethiopia (72:10). By omitting 72:8-17, the lectionary has avoided the violent imagery of the psalm (72:9-11) but has also eliminated verses that emphasize the king’s responsibility for social justice (72:12-14).

Romans 15:4-13

The church in Rome was demographically different from other churches Paul addressed because of the large numbers of Jews who belonged to it. In Romans, therefore, Jewish-Gentile issues have a prominent place. Here Paul reminds Jewish Christians of the scriptural basis for the Gentile mission, and he reminds Gentiles of their origins in Judaism and in Jewish scripture.

Matthew 3:1-12

Drawn from Mark and the sayings-source Q (sayings material we find in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke but not in Mark), Luke 3:7 has John address his “Brood of Vipers” speech to all who come for Baptism, whereas Matthew restricts it to the Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7), the two principal religious/political parties of first-century Palestine with whom Jesus constantly struggled throughout his ministry.

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