

## Behold! A Branch Is Growing

- ☆ **Powered by the Spirit (vv.1-3a)**
- ☆ **Judging in righteousness (vv.3b-5)**
- ☆ **Glory of the nations (vv.6-10)**

In the name of Jesus, the Branch of David's tree from Jesse's stump, dear people of God:

Like so many things in the world out there, what goes on in here passes by unnoticed. Unless you came to God's house today, you probably would not realize we are crossing over from one Church Year into the next. Advent is the season of preparation to celebrate Christ's first coming at Christmas and to prepare for His second and final coming on the Last Day. If you ever survived a hurricane or a great fire, you know how great it was to be prepared. The high winds and raging fires of the Last Day will melt the elements with fervent heat. We all do well to be fully prepared by faith!

Crossing into Advent reminds me of another crossing a few weeks ago. After our WELS-Asia Translators Conference in Hong Kong, I needed to cross over into the mainland by way of Shenzhen. I was a bit nervous, as one missionary tried to explain changing trains. A young Friends of China pastor overheard and said, "Why don't you come with me and the brother? We're headed to Wuhan tomorrow." Realize: Hong Kong is 7 million people. From a sleepy little village in 1979, Shenzhen has burst with foreign investments into the most densely populated city in China: 15 million. Our seven-county metro Twin Cities of Minneapolis / Saint Paul is less than 3 million. In all our crossings we need God!

### ☆ **Powered by the Spirit (vv.1-3a)**

Something else most folks don't notice during Minnesota's harsh winters are the buds on trees. I was surprised one year to see the swelling on the branches already in February. The Holy Spirit that gives life to all things keeps working quietly with His divine creative power. We only notice when the weather turns warm and suddenly the trees are green again. God grows all without our knowing.

So it was 700 years before Christ. The Holy Spirit used picture language through His prophets like Isaiah to show how God would destroy super power nations. Imagine someone saying back in the 1960's that within thirty years the mighty Soviet Union would disintegrate without a shot. For God it's like cutting down a tall tree. First it's standing, then within minutes it's lying on the ground. In Isaiah's day the superpower was Assyria. They would fall. Babylon was 100 years off, but God would topple that tree too. And sadly, God's chosen nation of Israel would lose all power from worshipping false gods.

On a family vacation to the redwoods of northern California, my siblings and I were amazed. Huge trees were growing out of fallen ones. And old stumps had new sprouts too. Years later I learned the redwoods are unique. When the pioneers tried to clear farmland, those mighty giants kept growing back. Redwoods are rare in the way they regrow themselves. That's the Creator's power at work.

So it would be for the royal line of David and his father Jesse. God had promised a Savior through David 300 years before Isaiah. It would take another 700 years, but that Savior would come through the virgin womb of Mary. *"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 power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."* This Savior would execute God's plan to deliver us from all guilt. In counsel with the Father and the Holy Spirit, Jesus would conquer sin, death and hell. All the data of nature, science and spirituality would be in His grasp to bring about God's saving will. **Behold! A Branch Is Growing – Powered by the Spirit.**

***“He will delight in the fear of the LORD.”*** This is not the slave like fear of sin that hopes God will never come. This is the childlike *fear* that hopes God will never go away. It hopes Jesus’ Last Day of redemption will come quickly. On a steel door into the back of an apartment building, my friend and translator Pastor Mark Chen publicizes all he can to bring precious souls into this delightful ***“fear of the LORD.”*** Mark chose Shenzhen after seminary graduation because few other Christians were there. He lives with his wife Anna and baby daughter Shina to bring the Good News of Jesus to all.

### ☆ **Judging in righteousness (vv.3b-5)**

And it’s a good thing Mark is working for Jesus. The world would never hire him or me for this work. We’re not impressive enough for those who judge by outward appearances. Mark worked eighteen months on the street before the Holy Spirit moved the first woman to convert. On a Saturday night this October, his core group gathered for Bible study. They were led in song by one of the sisters. Who in the world of sin would be impressed? But our Lord Jesus is, because this is His work from first to last. Isaiah writes: ***“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.”*** Mark Chen’s congregation is mostly made up of factory workers whom the Chinese education system determined will not be allowed to study for advanced degrees. But each soul is precious in God’s sight not for who they are, but for what God brings to them.

Again of the Messiah, the Holy Spirit says through Isaiah: ***“He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.”*** ***“The rod of his mouth”*** is the Word of God that offers God’s ***“righteousness”*** to us as a gift, and also gives us the faith to receive it. Remember Philip Keller’s stories of the Masai shepherd boys in East Africa? Each would choose a sapling with a knob near the roots and make a knob-kerrie “rod” from it. Sheep wandering off over there? Swish through the air and the recalcitrant beast comes back. Cobra coiled on the rock they were climbing – Philip Keller says the Masai shepherd boy saved his life in the blink of an eye. Keller did not see the shepherd’s rod fly. He just saw the dead snake. So Satan must die and all His followers when Jesus brings the righteousness God demands and gives us heaven as a free gift of God’s grace. Truly Jesus is the ...

### ☆ **Glory of the nations (vv.6-10)**

Many Christians have read these words and wondered what to do with them: ***“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 hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.”***

Is the Holy Spirit telling us there will be animals in heaven? Some God fearing scholars believe so. It may be that animals alive on the Last Day will be changed to live in the new heaven and the new earth God promised to create. I am certain heaven will be full of awesome surprises which may include that favorite pet running up to you with wagging tail, then talking to you about all the joys of home with God. Or God may be using picture language for our infantile, earthbound minds to understand a tiny bit of the bliss He has in store for us. What we might expect here will be replaced by the unexpected there.

But this is the day the Lord has made, and we rejoice to see Christ coming already. Our brothers and sisters at Mark Chen’s church in Shenzhen understand very little English, but it’s still more than my Chinese. Mark was being kind when he commented that I had gone from a two-year-old to “four years old” in my Mandarin. But what unites us is not our language or our culture. It’s our faith in Jesus Christ who came to be the Savior of all. These dear Christians cherish the cross just as we do. Many of them are first generation Christians who remember the fear and darkness from which Christ delivers us. The best is yet to be. We see Jesus, the **Glory of the nations. Behold! A Branch Is Growing.** Amen.