



ABOUT THE THEME

Advent is a season of waiting, but is idle waiting what God wants of us? In preparation for the coming Messiah, we wonder together—what things can't wait? What demands our immediate attention? What requires our work and preparation? What is it that God can't wait for? Is it our praise, reconciliation, and proclamation? Is it the end of suffering, isolation, and fear? This Advent, we are invited to join in imagining, prioritizing, and preparing. As we wait, what can't?

DECEMBER 8th | 2nd SUNDAY OF ADVENT | REPENTANCE CAN'T WAIT (Peace can't wait) ISAIAH 11:1-10 & MATT 3:1-12

Isaiah points to a peace this world has yet to know—peace where the wolf lies with the lamb and a child shall lead us. John the Baptist invites us to believe in this vision of peace, but first, we must repent of the ways we turn away from God and do harm to others and ourselves. Only through honest confession can we seek reconciliation and become vessels of God's peace, facilitators of the Kingdom of God drawn near.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- In light of these scriptures, what *can't* wait? What *can*?
- Where is God at work to bring about *peace*? Where are we joining God in this work?

Isaiah 11:1-10 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

11 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
2 The spirit of the Lord shall 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.
3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;
4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
6 The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
7 The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
9 They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.
10 On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;
the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.
11 On that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to
recover the remnant that is left of his people, from Assyria, from
Egypt, from Pathros, from Ethiopia, from Elam, from Shinar, from
Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

Matthew 3:1-12 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

3 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea,
proclaiming, **2** "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come
near." **3** This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he
said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'"

4 Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around
his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. **5** Then the people
of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region
along the Jordan, **6** and they were baptized by him in the river
Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for
baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to
flee from the wrath to come? **8** Bear fruit worthy of repentance. **9** Do
not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our
ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up
children to Abraham. **10** Even now the ax is lying at the root of the
trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down
and thrown into the fire.

11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more
powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his
sandals. He will baptize you with ^{the} Holy Spirit and fire. **12** His
winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor
and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn
with unquenchable fire."

Romans 15:4-13 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our
instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of
the scriptures we might have hope. **5** May the God of steadfastness
and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another,
in accordance with Christ Jesus, **6** so that together you may with one
voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you,
for the glory of God. **8** For I tell you that Christ has become a servant
of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he
might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, **9** and in order
that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,
"Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to your name";

10 and again he says, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people";

11 and again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all the peoples praise him";

12 and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope."

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so
that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

ARTISTS' STATEMENTS



A CHILD SHALL LEAD THEM by Lisle Gwynn Garrity inspired by Isaiah 11:1-10 | graphic image

The image of the stump of Jesse might have knocked the air out of those first hearing these words. The stump represented the end of the Davidic dynasty, the family line believed to carry Yahweh's goodness. The monarchy was either thwarted by the Babylonian exile, or the Assyrian empire—historically, we're not exactly sure. Regardless, Isaiah names what no one wants to say out loud—Jerusalem's political future feels dead, cut off, stunted by despair.

The image of a stump might accurately represent how we feel about our own future. Greenhouse gases and sea levels continue to rise. No place—schools, sanctuaries, theaters, malls—is safe from mass shooting attacks. Our government leaders fight like lions and wolves starving for dominance.

We also need Isaiah's vision for a reordered world where creation exists in harmony, not as a threat to itself. When reading this poetry of peace, I found myself pausing at the line, "and a child shall lead them" (Is. 11:6). The example of Naomi Wadler came to mind. After the Parkland, FL, school shooting, Naomi, an eleven-year-old at the time, organized a walkout at her elementary school to honor victims of gun violence. In addition to those slain in Parkland, Naomi and her fifth-grade classmates also recognized people of color who are killed by gun violence every day and never make news headlines. Naomi went on to speak courageously before crowds in DC and on TV shows about the need for gun reform. When she spoke, she held the nation—and much of the world—captive with her passion, her insight, and her urgency.

Where is new life shooting up? Perhaps in the places where God can't wait for peace. Perhaps in the voices of our children, who urge us to find a better way.



ONE WITH MYSTERY by Lauren Wright Pittman inspired by Matthew 3:1-12 | graphic image

A curious, odd, status quo-threatening man emerges in the wilderness of Judea. He shouts in the place of desolation—a dangerous place where God has repeatedly shown up throughout Israel's history. John lifts up his voice, entreating people to make an about-face from the things that keep them from God, and move toward the new thing God is doing. He invites people to dip their weary bodies into the river, wade into mystery, and to tell the truth—taking on a posture of confession and surrender.

This eccentric man wears the clothes and eats the food of one living at the mercy of the land. His embodiment is that of an outcast, defined by common elements—camel hair, locusts, and honey. This is the one entrusted with introducing the world to God's incarnate self. John's cries bring the powerful to

the edges of society where Jesus would spend his life and ministry. John points us to where God is to be found—in the wilderness, at the margins of power, at the periphery of looming, destructive systems, where the waters of Baptism ripple and swirl, where grace is abundant and God draws near.

I drew John at one with the wilderness. His shape is hardly distinguished from the powdery textures and deep, cool colors of the waters of the Jordan. He is at one with the wonder and mystery of the coming Messiah. He holds out his hand, inviting the viewer to choose trust and dive fully into the unknown. —Lauren Wright Pittman

SOMETHING MORE TO CONSIDER

- The stump of Jesse represents the end of the Davidic dynasty, the family line believed to carry God's goodness and righteousness. This image of the "stump" likely portrayed the fear and uncertainty many felt about Jerusalem's future. What might be a modern-day example of a "stump"? What fears do we hold about our future?
- John the Baptist's invitation to baptism reflects the ritual tradition of Jewish proselyte baptism. The ritual emphasized spiritual cleansing for Gentiles (anyone outside the Jewish tradition) being welcomed as new members of a Jewish tribe. How does this ritual of baptism differ from the practice and meaning of baptism in our faith community?
- Why does John the Baptist insist that repentance can't wait? How might his social location and lifestyle contribute to his sense of urgency for such radical transformation?
- The Hebrew word for "repent" means "to turn." Literally, this means to return or change directions; metaphorically, this connotes radically changing your behaviors or perspective. In Matthew 3:1-12, the word used for "repent" stems from the Greek noun, *metanoia*, which refers to a transformative change of heart. The Hebrew word *shalom*, often translated as "peace," speaks to completeness, wholeness, and restoration. Given these translations and connotations, what is the relationship between repentance and peace?