

## **“Stunned By Jesus’ Arrival”**

**Matthew 3:1-12**

**Isaiah 11:1-10**

The prophets predicted it. If there was no repentance, if there was no change – the Kingdom would fall.

The Assyrians came from the north killing and burning everything in their path. The Northern Kingdom of Israel is conquered. They march on to the Southern Kingdom of Judah and its capital, Jerusalem. In the midst of the burning forests and the blackness of death, there comes a Messiah, a new branch, a new song, a new era.

Isaiah 11:1-3 . . . <sup>1</sup>A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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.

Oh, how we long for that day when we might look to a man who has the “Spirit of the Lord resting on him”, “Who with righteousness shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth”. Oh, how we long for that day when there will be peace on earth and enemies no more.

Isaiah longed for that day and that man who would bring peace on earth; as did all the prophets of old – Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Micah, and in our Advent gospel text – John the Baptist.

Many Jews were awaiting the Messiah as prophesied by Isaiah and the prophets. John's personality and his message fit exactly the popular expectation of his time. Now it was not the Assyria of Isaiah's time but Rome who conquered with darkness and death.

Again the people longed for that day when they might look to a man who has the "Spirit of the Lord resting on him", "Who with righteousness shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth".

John fit the bill. He fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy as the "voice of one crying in the wilderness." He's wearing camel's hair and a leather girdle. He's eating organic food, low fat locust pods and wild honey. People from the whole region are drawn to him and his message.

John is calling people to repentance, to confess their sins. This call to repentance is nothing new. All the prophets before him preached repentance. And like the prophets of old, John preached judgment.

You bloodsuckers! You brood of vipers! "The axe is lying at the root of the tree; every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire!"

This hairy man, eating locust pods from the locust tree and standing in the Jordan River shouting words of judgment and then baptizing. "I baptize you with water for repentance".

This was different and new. The people had seen and heard rough — looking prophets crying out in the wilderness before, but never one who baptized in the river. John offered a sacrament of repentance. No prophet ever did this before. You could come to the river to hear his preaching and then respond to his words by wading into the river and have your sins washed away by a water that would have you survive the fiery judgment.

But John would not baptize just anyone who came. When he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "you bloodsuckers! You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit worthy of repentance".

John preached repentance and baptized with Jordan River water. Even when he preaches of the coming Messiah, it is a message of judgment. The people listen, frightened.

Again he shouts at the top of his voice, "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. His winnowing fork in his hand, and he will clear the threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire!"

Then he stops. There is silence. An inconspicuous carpenter steps out of the crowd. He is not what the Baptist had expected. Yet everybody feels; this is he! The Baptist is stunned by Jesus' arrival.

This Jesus who first arrived in a cave below the town of Bethlehem to a teenage, unmarried mother and a nervous father, stunned by his arrival. Herod stunned by his arrival and the babies are murdered in Bethlehem. The devil stunned by his arrival in the wilderness after the Jordan River. The sick and the dying stunned by his arrival. The religious leaders stunned by his arrival. Everywhere he went; great crowds were stunned by his arrival. Mary and Martha are stunned by his arrival to raise their brother from the dead. Pontius Pilate is stunned by his arrival in the palace. His followers are stunned by his arrival at Golgotha. But no one is more stunned by his arrival than Mary outside his empty tomb on Easter morning.

He appears to his disciples in the Upper Room. He walks with them along the road. He prepares breakfast fish for them on the shore of the Galilean Lake. Stunned by his arrival.

Who of us will be stunned by Jesus' arrival during this Advent time of preparing for his coming? A mother was stunned by a letter she received from her son.

Sally jumped up as soon as she saw the surgeon come out of the operating room. She said: "How is my little boy? Is he going to be all right? When can I see him?" The surgeon said, "I'm sorry. We did all we could, but your boy didn't make it." Sally said, "Why do little children get cancer? Doesn't God care any more? Where were you, God, when my son needed you?" The surgeon asked, "Would you like some time alone with your son? One of the nurses will be out in a few minute, before he's transported to the university. Sally asked the nurse to stay with her while she said goodbye to her son. She ran her fingers lovingly through his thick red curly hair. "Would you like a lock of his hair?" the nurse asked. Sally nodded yes. The nurse cut a lock of the boy's hair, put it in a plastic bag and handed it to Sally. The mother said, "It was Jimmy's idea to donate his body to the University for Study. He said it might help somebody else. "I said no at first," but Jimmy said, "Mom, I won't be using it ."

She went on, "My Jimmy had a heart of gold. Always thinking of someone else. Always wanting to help others if he could." Sally walked out of Children's Mercy Hospital for the last time, after spending most of the last six months there.

She put the bag with Jimmy's belongings on the seat beside her in the car. The drive home was difficult. It was even harder to enter the empty house. She carried Jimmy's belongings, and the plastic bag with the lock of his hair to her son's room.

She started placing the model cars and other personal things, back in his room exactly where he had always kept them. She laid down across his bed and, hugging his pillow, cried herself to sleep.

It was around midnight when Sally awoke. Lying beside her on the bed was a folded letter. The letter said: “Dear Mom, I know you’re going to miss me; but don’t think that I will ever forget you, or stop loving you, just ‘cause I’m not around to say I LOVE YOU. I will always love you, Mom, even more with each day. Someday we will see each other again. Until then, if you want to adopt a little boy so you won’t be so lonely, that’s okay with me. He can have my room, and old stuff to play with. But, if you decide to get a girl instead, she probably wouldn’t like the same things us boys do. You’ll have to buy her dolls and stuff girls like, y’know.

Don’t be sad thinking about me. This really is a neat place. Grandma and Grandpa met me as soon as I got here and showed me around some but it will take a long time to see everything. The angels are so cool. I love to watch them fly. And, you know what? Jesus doesn’t look like any of his pictures. Yet, when I saw him, I knew it was him. Jesus himself took me to see GOD! And guess what, Mom? I got to sit on God’s knee and talk to Him like I was somebody important. That’s when I told him that I wanted to write you a letter, to tell you goodbye and everything. But I already knew that wasn’t allowed. Well, y’know what Mom? God handed me some paper and his own personal pen to write you this letter. I think Gabriel is the name of the angel who is going to drop this letter off to you. God said for me to give you the answer to one of the questions you asked him: ‘Where was he when I needed him?’ “God said he was in the same place with me, as when his son Jesus was on the cross.

He was right there, as he always is with all his children. Oh, by the way, Mom, no one else can see what I've written except you to everyone else this is just a blank piece of paper. Isn't that cool? I have to give God his pen back now. He needs it to write some more names in the Book of Life.

Tonight I get to sit at the table with Jesus for supper. I'm, sure the food will be great. Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. I don't hurt anymore. The cancer is all gone. I'm glad because I couldn't stand that pain anymore and God couldn't stand to see me hurt so much, either. That's when he sent the Angel of Mercy to come get me. The Angel said I was Special Delivery! How about that?

Signed with Love from God, Jesus and Me.

Will Jesus arrive in the midst of deep grief over the death of a spouse or a parent or a daughter or son as you prepare for your first Christmas without that person and the love you shared?

Will Jesus arrive in the midst of deep anger over a divorce and the breaking up of your family as you prepare for Christmas separately?

Will Jesus arrive in the midst of deep conflict between parents and child and wanting to avoid Christmas altogether?

Will Jesus arrive in the midst of deep agony over whether or not to move your spouse or your parent into a nursing home?

Will Jesus arrive in the midst of deep struggle over whether or not to stay with your job into a new year?

Will Jesus arrive in the life of an angry old man who no longer believes there is a God?

Will Jesus arrive in the midst of a congregation with so much potential and on the verge of doing even greater ministry in his name?

Who of us will be stunned by Jesus' arrival during this Advent time of preparing for his coming?

As we prepare for Christmas, open your hearts to being stunned and warmed, maybe even heated, by Jesus' arrival. Jesus' presence in you and with you in your relationships with others probably won't be what you expected. Thank God for holy moments, for holy surprises as we prepare for the coming of our Lord.

Let this Christmas be "stunning" as we open our hearts anew to the arrival of Jesus.

May the peace of God . . .

#243 – Lost in the Night