

# Living Expectantly: Christ's Birth & Grown-ups

Thomas Robinson, December 20, 2015

## Isaiah 11:1-9

<sup>1</sup> There shall come forth a **shoot** from the **stump of Jesse**, | and a **branch** from his **roots** shall bear fruit. | <sup>2</sup> And **the Spirit of THE LORD (Yahweh)** shall rest upon him, |

**the Spirit of wisdom and understanding**, |

**the Spirit of counsel and might**, |

**the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of THE LORD (Yahweh)**. |

<sup>3</sup> And his **delight** shall be in the fear of THE LORD (Yahweh). |

He shall not judge by what his eyes see, | or decide disputes by what his ears hear, | <sup>4</sup> but with **righteousness** he shall **judge the poor**, | and decide with **equity** for **the meek of the earth**; | and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, | and with the breath/Spirit of his lips he shall destroy the wicked. | <sup>5</sup> **Righteousness** shall be the belt of his waist, | and **faithfulness** the belt of his loins. |

<sup>6</sup> The **wolf** shall dwell with the **lamb**, | and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, | and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; | and a **little child** shall lead them. | <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze; | their young shall lie down together; | and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. | <sup>8</sup> The **nursing child** shall play over the hole of the cobra, | and the **weaned child** shall put his hand on the adder's den. |

<sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy | in **all my holy mountain**; | for **the earth** shall be full of **the knowledge of THE LORD (Yahweh)** | as the waters cover the sea. [Also Isa 65:25; Hab. 2:14]

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## Isaiah 7:14 Isaiah gives God's sign to king Ahaz of Judah in about 734 b.c.

<sup>14</sup> Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name *Immanuel*.

## Isaiah 9:6 Isaiah speaks of the expectation of God's renewal in a child's birth.

<sup>6</sup> For to us a child is born, | to us a son is given; | and the government shall be upon his shoulder, | and his name shall be called | Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, | Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

## Luke 1:30-33 The angel Gabriel foretells to Mary the birth and identity of Jesus.

<sup>30</sup> And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor (grace) with God. <sup>31</sup> And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. <sup>32</sup> He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, <sup>33</sup> and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

## Luke 1:46-55 Mary praises God when she visits Elizabeth before Jesus' birth.

<sup>46</sup> And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, | <sup>47</sup> and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, | <sup>48</sup> for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. | For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; | <sup>49</sup> for he who is mighty has done great things for me, | and holy is his name. | <sup>50</sup> And his mercy is for those who fear him | from generation to generation. |

<sup>51</sup> He has shown strength with his arm; | he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts; | <sup>52</sup> he has brought down the mighty from their thrones | and exalted those of humble estate; | <sup>53</sup> he has filled the hungry with good things, | and the rich he has sent away empty. | <sup>54</sup> He has helped his servant Israel, | in remembrance of his mercy, | <sup>55</sup> as he spoke to our fathers, | to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

## 1 Corinthians 15:58 Paul points to the outcome of living expectantly.

<sup>58</sup> Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

## **A Branch from a Stump**

We're reflecting on some important passages in Isaiah's prophecies that resonate powerfully in the birth and life of Jesus. We began with the sign of the birth of a child: *"the virgin shall conceive and bear a son" (7:14); "to us a child is born, to us a son is given (9:6). God's unique creative power breaking in to begin new life: Sarah & Isaac...Mary & Jesus.*

But in Isaiah's day, with faithless king Ahaz, it wasn't enough. He wanted military help now, not God's promises with whatever signs. It was the superpower Assyria who could bring in the god of war. Ahaz sold his nation and religion to Assyria for immediate war help.

But the sign of the child Immanuel, meaning "God is with us." does not go away because of the faithlessness of Judah's king. Judah was on a wild downward spiral. The siren songs of pagan power & gods, desire for military might and national glory, led to disastrous choices, and ultimately the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and to exile.

Isaiah looks into that dark future and to the God who is with his people in spite of themselves. He sees the house of King David ("Jesse," David's father) like a tree cut down to a stump. In art, the "Tree of Jesse" is portrayed as a flourishing family tree. But Isaiah sees it in darker tones. It's hopeless, powerless. Except! "God is with us" and God is creator of life and hope. Even from the stump God's Spirit brings forth a shoot, a branch. The Messiah-King – that child, Prince of peace – he brings justice and renewal. And what renewal! Not just a better king with saner policies. A renewal of the world!

Isaiah is challenging the people and us to realize what it means for God to be with us. God is not going to be the genie to do just what we want. He calls us to see the world on a different scale, with different values and possibilities. He calls us to great expectations.

## **Living in a World with a God beyond Control**

That is the challenge of God. The world we try to control, make sense of, make work for us is a world inside 'God with us,' inside God's wild, uncontrollable, surprising, beautiful grace. It can be very upsetting. We want control and rationality. God loves grace and surprises. Sometimes people get upset at the miracles of Christmas, like the virgin birth. But it's a tiny miracle, a sign that something big is happening – the great wonder of incarnation.

God has created a knowable world, a world of science. No miracle changes science. A miracle is a sign of God's larger pervasive reality within which we live in a knowable world. God loves order with room for surprise. A little wildness, chaos, quantum uncertainty, thrown in.

Do you want control? Humans mess it up. But God stays with us with surprising grace.

## **Living in a World that holds Promises**

Gabriel comes to Mary: God has decided to act now, here to fulfill his promises. Are there really promises in our world or only mechanical cause and effect? Has God made promises? Yes! Even I can promise. God promises open-ended grace and fulfills it in astonishing ways.

Mary recognizes it and wants to be part of the unfolding future. She expresses it with "past tense" certainty, open to God's surprising ways of fulfillment. He is doing it. Watch!

Paul challenges us to see all that we do within that frame of great expectations of the God who creates and recreates in resurrection. Everything about Jesus, birth to resurrection, says "I love you." Your life matters, nothing you do is meaningless. I am with you!