December 5, 2010, Sermon: Isaiah 11:1-10

Series A: Sunday of the Church Year: Advent 2
Sunday Theme: Preparation
First Lesson: Isaiah 11:1-10
Second Lesson: Romans 15:4-13 (Promote a Spirit of Peace)
Gospel: Matthew 3:1-12 (John Prepares the Way)
Preaching Date: December 5, 2010
Preaching Place: Our Savior’s, East Brunswick, NJ

Dear Humble Children of God:

I’m sure you have noticed that we have been cutting down trees on our church property. Some of you have even gotten out your chainsaws and buzzed away at the trees or did the heavy cleanup work. As a result there are a lot of stumps out there of various sizes and heights.

These stumps can stand as a reminder of a truth that we have in our text for today.

A. About a thousand years before Jesus came, the family tree of Jesse shot up tall and strong.
   1. Through his youngest son, David, the Lord brought this family as the leading family of Israel. He was a mighty King and without a doubt the most famous king Israel ever had. Through him the Lord started a royal trunk with many family branches. At David’s time, this royal house can be pictured as a tall tree.
   2. About twenty of David’s descendants had served as kings in Jerusalem, but many of them had abused their high office. Many ruled selfishly instead of in the interest of God’s people. Some were idolaters and actually led the people of Judah into false worship.
   3. Then God’s judgment struck as a chainsaw at the trunk of a tree. The once powerful nation of Israel was cut down by an invading army from Babylon. Her beautiful capital city was trashed and then torched, and the brightest and best of her people were led off into captivity a thousand miles away from home. Only a handful returned seventy years later.
   4. You could not really call that a proud tree, could you? All that was left was a stump of what had once been a great tree. At the time the Son of God came to earth there was no descendant of King David on the throne in Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, that royal house had fallen so far that Israel didn’t even call it the house of David; he called it by David’s father’s name and honestly spoke of it as the stump of Jesse.

B. Then, miraculously, a tiny shoot sprouted from that decaying stump.
   1. The prophet Jeremiah helps us to understand that the shoot referred to here is not a piece of wood but a person: “The days are coming,” declares the
LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely, and do what is just and right in the land ... This is the name by which he will be called, The LORD our righteousness” (Jeremiah 23:5,6).

“The Humble Shoot is the Lord Jesus”

2. And the stump reminds us that Jesus came from a humble background. There was nothing very impressive about the Jewish nation at the time Christ was born. It had long since lost its independence; it was only a puppet of the great Roman Empire. Isaiah’s prophecy pictures the Messiah for us in terms we will do well to remember as we plan our Christmas celebration. He was born not in a palace, but in a stable, to a young lady from the line of David who was engaged to a carpenter from the line of David. But don’t misunderstand his humility. The lowly shoot from the stump of Jesse is your Lord; he is Lord of all. In order to trade places with us he laid aside the power and position he had and became the humblest of servants. When he was born, people hardly noticed, just as you might not notice a little shoot from a stump on our property.

3. A mistake many Christians make in celebrating Christmas is that of spending too much time on the unimportant busyness. All the shopping, presents and end of year deadlines may very well distract the best of us. Even concentrating on the outward circumstance of Jesus birth may not catch the more important faith-building teachings of this miracle. It’s interesting that the Apostle Paul, who has much to say about what Christmas means for us, never says a thing about the stable and the manger and the swaddling clothes and the fact that there was no room for Mary and Joseph in the inn.

Transition: Isaiah helps us understand what miracles are involved.

C. A Branch will bear fruit” (11:1b).

The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him – the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, and the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD – and he will delight in the fear of the LORD” (11:2).

1. Although he came from a humble background, the miraculous shoot from the stump of Jesse is equipped by God to bring Christmas gifts to God’s people. The Holy Spirit equipped him with wisdom and understanding. In fact, he is called “the Word” which conveys the assurance that every word that he spoke with his most from was the wisdom and understanding of God himself. There is some wisdom you can learn from books. There is some wisdom you can learn from your own experience. There is another kind of wisdom and understanding that only the Spirit of God can teach a person.

2. Think of the harsh message of God’s law he brought to the religious leaders who imagined that with their performance they had lived up to the requirements of God’s law. They thought they earned a nice branch in the
family tree of God’s people. Isaiah prophesies, “He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked” (11:4b). The rod out of his mouth is the preaching of the law. He called the arrogant white-washed tombs which are beautiful on the outside, but on the inside are filled with dead men’s bones and everything unclean” (Matthew 23:27). He labeled the self-righteous, “You snakes. You brood of vipers” (Matthew 23:33). He gives us the same gift of humility through the rod of his mouth. We too are to remind ourselves of why Jesus came. He came because of sin, our sin. No one will ever really understand Christmas until they acknowledge their own sinfulness. Opening the eyes of sinners comes from the wisdom and understanding of the Holy Spirit.

3. But the greater wisdom and understanding is the gospel. It was proclaimed to the shepherds by the angels on that first Christmas night. They announced, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10,11). Then the sky burst open with angels praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

4. Let’s talk about that peace. There is too much misunderstanding about it. Not many know the real meaning of “Peace on earth.” Just listen to some of the Christmas songs. “Peace on earth” is not a horizontal peace. The angels didn’t say “peace among men.” Rather it is “Peace toward men” from God. It’s a vertical peace. Charles Wesley got it right when he wrote, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”. He wrote, “Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.” Do you notice that vertical peace?

5. Isaiah pictures that peace as fantastic imaginary. He pictures life as in a paradise (Isaiah 11:6-9). Before sin entered the world, the lions didn’t eat the sheep, nor did the leopards eat the goats. You could have observed the bear and the cow grazing together and their young merrily playing with each other. There was perfect harmony and peace among every creature. If Adam and Eve would have been strong and stayed in the Garden, their children could have led the animals. A little girl could put her hand into a snake pit without any danger at all. A little boy could happily play with a cobra and both would enjoy the play time. There would be perfect love between God and man and among all creation. Their knowledge of God would be personal, filled with affection and free from fear.

6. But then they approached the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eve willingly and wantingly took the fruit off the branch of that deadly tree. There they were cut down like a tree on our property. They became dead because they were cut off from the source of life.

7. It took another tree – the tree of the cross to reverse the curse and restore the future of God’s people. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree... by his wounds you have been healed (1 Peter 2:24).

D. The Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples (11:10)
1. The Hebrew word for *banner* means something that is lifted up. No longer will the House of David be described as a stump. It will be a gathering point for the people of God. All nations will rally to it. It will be a sign of victory for all who come and rest under its shade.

2. The message of peace will be proclaimed to all nations, as we see it happening this Christmas. This last week I received an amazing YouTube forward. It was a surprise for the crowds of shoppers at Macy's when the Opera Company of Philadelphia started singing out of nowhere. It's amazing to me in a society which tends to frown upon any public display of faith, that God would display his glory at a public and exclusive store. This has been shooting around the internet. Indeed "He will reign for ever and ever. Hallelujah!" It just proves once again that there is an Almighty God in heaven. He did save us. And he does broadcast his message to the ends of the earth.

3. And it only gets better. On the day of his second coming, he will take all who trust in him to a Paradise called heaven. There we will once again enjoy the Garden of Paradise. We will eat with everlasting power from the tree of life. What joy! What peace! What comfort in every sorrow! What life!

Conclusion:
So when you see all those stumps out on our property, don't think of something dead and gone. Think of Isaiah, chapter 11. Remember the little green shoot that came out of the stump of Jesse. Confess that Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the Son of David is that little sprig that grows out of the family tree of Jesse. Acknowledge that he has the Spirit of wisdom and understanding. Believe him when he humbles us with showing us our sin. And trust in him as he announces his peace through the forgiveness of sins he won for us on the tree of the cross. Also imagine those stumps as growing into a mighty tree, so big and beautiful that multitudes from every nation will come and find rest and joy in its shade. All because Jesus was that humble shoot of Jesse. Amen.