

Christmas-time is filled with anticipation. Mary and Joseph looked forward to the fruit of her womb and how all God's promises to Israel would be fulfilled. This morning we're going to talk about what this anticipation still looks like in our own lives as the Lord brings forth good fruit in his church.

OPENING PRAYER

ISAIAH 11:1-10

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.² And the Spirit of the LORD 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.³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear,⁴ 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 of his lips he shall kill the wicked.⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.⁶ 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.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 cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den.⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples, of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

The prophet proclaimed, **Isaiah 11:1**, “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.” The “shoot,” “the branch” of Jesse which bore fruit was first, King David, the son of Jesse, who ruled Israel for 40 years as “a man after God’s own heart.” But secondly and more importantly the “**roots (which) shall bear fruit**” is Jesus, the ultimate heir of God’s promises to David, who himself came to reign over Israel, and, indeed, the whole world forever.

What is this fruit? The prophet proclaimed, **Isaiah 11:2**, “the Spirit of the LORD 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.”

This is the fruit. I want to talk about the **“knowledge and the fear of the LORD,”** the fruit of God’s work among us which we find runs throughout the Scriptures.

The **“knowledge of the Lord”** is about what’s going on here, in our minds, that place where we think about the things of God, but it's also about what’s going on here, in our hearts, where the things in our minds shape our character.

Have you ever read a Steven King book? I have, and I tell you, I don’t want to live in that man’s head! I don’t want what’s happening in his mind to shape my identity! On the other hand, have you ever read the Bible? There’s lots of good identity-transforming stuff in it.

As regards **“the fear of the Lord,”** largely, we’ve been taught that this about respect. However, it does mean fear, as in being afraid, afraid of God’s mighty hand of judgment against all wrong-doing, everything contrary to his will and his holiness. Thus we must repent of these things so that we may receive his pardon.

But the fear of God is also about respect, and reverence, and trust. The psalmist writes, **Psalm 130:4, “With you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.”** Here’s how I meditate on this passage: I reflect on God, creator of the universe and everything in it, and how he gently reached down even to me, poor miserable sinner that I am, to make me his son, an heir of his Kingdom. I am overwhelmed by this work of my Lord, and before his throne I tremble at his power and his mercy. This is the fear of God translated into reverence, awe, and trust.

Jesus revealed the **“knowledge and the fear of the Lord”** in his own person. He showed us what the **“knowledge of the Lord”** looks like by living it, and he demonstrated the **“fear of the Lord”** through his death on the Cross and his resurrection from the grave.

In the Gospel, John the Baptist brought this message home with his confrontation of the religious leaders of his day.

Matthew 3:1-12

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea,² “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”³ For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord; make His paths straight.’”⁴ Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey.⁵ Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him,⁶ and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.⁷ But when he saw many of

the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? **Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.**⁹ And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.¹⁰ **Even now the axe is laid to 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 He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.**¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and He will clear His threshing floor and **gather His wheat** into the barn, but **the chaff He will burn** with unquenchable fire."

In summary, the Lord hasn't been tending his fields for nothing! He expects them to bear fruit, and just as we learned earlier, the fruit God is looking for in his people is the "knowledge and fear of the Lord."

John said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. This was imagery taken straight from the prophet Joel about the Day of Judgment. With this "knowledge of God," John instilled in the people the "fear of the Lord," that they would repent for their sins, preparing their hearts for the Lord's return.

And this brings us to St. Paul's letter to the church in Rome. He wrote about the power of God's Word:

Romans 15:4-13

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.⁸ For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to 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 praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name."¹⁰ And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."¹¹ And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him."¹² And again Isaiah says,, "The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope."¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

Again, Paul wrote, **Romans 15:4, “Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”**

When Paul wrote, “**whatever was written in former days**” he was talking about the Old Testament, about how the Books of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms were recorded for our sake.

Now there are two different schools of thought concerning the use of the Old Testament. One school claims we should look at the stories, at the characters, and learn from them about what it means to be a good Christian. So, for example, we see that King David was a man after God’s own heart, and thus we should strive to imitate his devotion to the Lord.

The other school of thought teaches that when we study the Old Testament we see Jesus. For example, David was the king of God’s people for 40 years, leading them in the ways of the Lord. But he was only the prototype of an even greater king who would come after him, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, Jesus, the king of all nations, leading us before the very throne of God. So while David’s relationship with God can be an inspiration, more importantly, we see in him a likeness of our Lord Jesus, a foretaste of things to come.

This is the best way to read the Old Testament, which is to say, it’s all about Jesus! When the “**knowledge and the fear of the Lord**” seeps from our minds into our hearts, we’re encouraged, and we live in hope.

Paul wrote,

Romans 15:5-7

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

Consider Paul’s use of the words, “**harmony,**” “**in accord,**” “**together,**” “**one voice,**” and “**welcome.**” This is the thing that sets apart the Christian church from all other institutions, that is, that we are joined together in our minds and in our hearts for the sake of one mission, which is that we “**may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**”

Friends in Christ, this week let us grow in our “**knowledge and fear of the Lord**” by meditating on his Word daily.

This week let us see Jesus on every page, recognizing that our endurance and encouragement comes by grace through faith alone in him, our Lord and Savior.

And this week may you have the opportunity to share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.