

Second Sunday of Advent - Lectionary: 4



Reading 1 - [Isaiah 11:1-10](#)

On that day, a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD. Not by appearance shall he judge, nor by hearsay shall he decide, but he shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips. Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to guide them. The cow and the bear shall be neighbors, together their young shall rest; the lion shall eat hay like the ox. The baby shall play by the cobra's den, and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair. There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD, as water covers the sea. On that day, the root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, the Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious.

Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 72:1-2, 7-8, 12-13, 17](#) R. (cf. 7) Justice shall flourish in his time, and fullness of peace forever.

Reading 2 - [Romans 15:4-9](#)

Brothers and sisters: Whatever was written previously was written for our instruction, that by endurance and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God. For I say that Christ became a minister of the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, but so that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: Therefore, I will praise you among the Gentiles and sing praises to your name.

Gospel - [Matthew 3:1-12](#)

John the Baptist appeared, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" It was of him that the prophet Isaiah had spoken when he said: A voice of one crying out in the desert, Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths. John wore clothing made of camel's hair and had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. At that time Jerusalem, all Judea, and the whole region around the Jordan were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins.

When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce good fruit as evidence of your repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God can raise up children to Abraham from these stones. Even now the ax lies at the root of the trees. Therefore, every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand. He will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

Advent: The Light and Fire of Metanoia

"Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom, Lead Thou me on! The night is dark, and I am far from home. Lead Thou me on!" [John Henry Cardinal Newman](#), while journeying home from Italy in 1832, wrote those words as the beginning of a poem entitled, *'Lead, Kindly Light.'* That first stanza of the poem is praise, its prayer, but the entire poem is a proclamation of trust in the light and love of God in his life. Newman reminds us that God is light unbearable and love unfathomable. As the poem continues, he expresses what is at the heart of our life in Christ which was made possible by the God of light and love, through the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is the foundation from which come the words of St. Paul today, and when the Psalmist reminds us that [the living Word is like a lamp to our feet](#), indeed our hope is he who makes us one in himself, is a light to our path, and who invites us to put on his mind, represented by the candle of the First Sunday. It is also the heart of the message of John the Baptist. To come out of the darkness into the light. It is more than admitting and being sorry for sins. It involves metanoia, deep and radical change in one's thinking and behavior. It is transformation wrought within us - down into the deepest depths of our being. The fruit of which is the peace that surpasses understanding, represented by the candle of this Second Sunday of Advent.

This season of Advent highlights an important aspect our life in Christ, that we ought every day to be preparing for his coming again by living in the light of Christ that perfects our intellect¹ while pursuing the holiness proper to a sacred being that has been made in the image and likeness of their creator, the creator of all that exists, the visible and the invisible. Christ is, indeed, "Light from Light."² And, as St. Thomas

¹ John 1:9

² The phrase "light of Christ that perfects our intellect" refers to the Christian belief that Jesus, as the divine "true Light" (John 1:9), illuminates human understanding, dispelling spiritual darkness to reveal God's truth, guiding moral choices, and enabling deeper comprehension of divine realities, a concept explored by theologians like Thomas Aquinas, who described it as a created light that strengthens the intellect for divine vision, not a medium but a perfection, akin to the sun enabling natural sight. **Key Aspects of the Light of Christ-Source of Truth:** Jesus is the ultimate source of spiritual illumination, revealing God's nature and salvation plan, allowing humanity to see beyond sin and confusion. **Enlightens the Intellect:** This divine light, often associated with the Holy Spirit, empowers the human mind to grasp spiritual truths that would otherwise remain hidden in darkness. **Perfects Understanding:** It's not just knowledge but a

Acquinas taught, “*This light is required to see the divine essence, not as a similitude [the quality or state of being like something] in which God is seen, but as a perfection of the intellect, strengthening it to see God. Therefore, it may be said that this light is to be described not as a medium in which God is seen, but as one by which He is seen;*”³

The promise of Advent is as we heard in the first reading the bud that blossoms from the root of Jesse. That bud is Jesus the Nazarene, son of David, son of God.⁴ Since the Advent of his first coming, the children of God await the coming again of the one in whose light we live and by whose love we love. Our salvific baptism in Christ comes with the “Holy Spirit and fire”. The light of Christ enlightens us to the truths of God discoverable by nature and by grace. The Holy Spirit sets our hearts on fire, purifies and transforms us and makes us able to use the gifts given us. By the light of Christ, we see and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we follow. The Holy Spirit, with our cooperation will work to aide our preparation / pursuit of holiness, burning the chaff of our hearts and minds with unquenchable fire.

We hope in the God who saves, transforms, and empowers us to live our lives in such a way that the radiance of the light and love within us reveals to others the most authentic human path and the one who invites them to walk that path. No matter what our troubles, no matter what the state of our world, we draw hope and sustenance from the ideal vision of Isaiah in today’s first reading. An eschatological vision of the new dawn for all creation. The light of this vision also helps us to dispel the darkness of our world here and now. We share that hope which is for everyone. Our salvation and personal metanoia involve not just personal reformation but also becoming involved in the remaking of the whole world, bringing the whole world into the Reign of God.

Our salvific baptism in Christ comes with the Holy Spirit and fire. The Holy Spirit and fire. I would estimate, I would argue that most Christians never fully experience the Holy Spirit and fire of God. The Holy Spirit and fire of God that is meant to purify, to purge, to transform, to make something new and incredible, powerful even, powerful enough in its own transformation that those transformed go into the world and work for its transformation rather than become like that world, become the image and likeness of that world. The light of Christ enlightens us to the truths of God, discoverable by nature and by grace. The Holy Spirit sets our hearts on fire. On fire. Not a little tiny flame. Although that song, this little light of mine, you know, it's really a sweet song. I love it. But let that light of Christ in you be brilliant and the fire of the Holy Spirit be raging.

That Holy Spirit that sets our hearts on fire purifies and transforms us and makes us able to use the gifts given us, articulated in that first reading from Isaiah. By the light of Christ, we see and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit we are able to follow. There's the key, with our cooperation, the Holy Spirit will work to aid our preparation / pursuit of holiness burning the chaff of our hearts and minds with that unquenchable fire. Not only fueling us in our life in Christ but burning away the sin, the consequence the desires that are not of God.

perfection, enhancing the intellect’s capacity, much like natural light makes the eye able to see colors. **Dispels Darkness:** It exposes sin, provides clarity, and offers guidance in moral uncertainty, leading to a life aligned with God’s will. **Strengthens for Divine Vision:** In Thomistic thought, this “created light” prepares the intellect to see God’s essence, acting as a spiritual faculty rather than a mere medium.

³ Summa Theologiae: How God is known by us (Prima Pars, Q12 Article 5)

⁴ The phrase “bud that blossoms from the root of Jesse” refers to Jesus Christ, fulfilling the prophecy in **Isaiah 11:1**, where a “shoot” or “branch” (*netzer* in Hebrew) comes from Jesse’s line, signifying God’s promise of a Messiah from David’s family. Matthew’s Gospel uses this prophecy, linking the Hebrew word for “branch” (*netzer*) to “Nazarene,” implying Jesus, the Branch from Nazareth, fulfills these ancient promises of restoration and divine rule. **Key Elements:** Jesse was the father of King David, so this phrase signifies the royal lineage of the Messiah. In Isaiah 11:1, the Hebrew word *netzer* means “shoot” or “sprout”. The name of the town Nazareth (*Netzereth*) is linguistically linked to *netzer*, suggesting Jesus as the promised Branch. Matthew 2:23, though not directly quoting Isaiah, interprets the prophecy to mean Jesus, the “Branch,” would be from Nazareth, fulfilling the hope for a righteous ruler from David’s stump. In essence, the prophecy speaks of life emerging from what seems barren (David’s “stump”), with the Messiah, Jesus, as the ultimate blossoming fruit of God’s covenant, bringing justice and peace.

This Advent, perhaps let your greater awareness and focus be on the ways in which you can be better prepared to receive Christ, rest on questions such as these.

1. Apparent distractions don't always have to become detrimental to prayer, however there are some that just need to be overcome. Name it and really investigate how to overcome it with the help of God.
2. Do some research on 'Metanoia' and then reflect on your ongoing experience.
3. How is God inviting you to a new way of thinking about something?
4. How can you cooperate more with the graces God gives you?
5. Which parts of your life feel "too busy" for God?

Glossary of Key Terms

Term	Definition
Advent	A season that highlights the importance of preparing every day for Christ's coming again by living in His light and pursuing holiness.
Bud that blossoms from the root of Jesse	A prophetic reference to Jesus Christ, fulfilling Isaiah 11:1. It signifies the Messiah coming from the lineage of King David (whose father was Jesse) and links the Hebrew word for "branch" (<i>netzer</i>) to Jesus being the "Nazarene."
Chaff	The undesirable parts of the heart and mind—sin, consequences of sin, and desires not of God—that the "unquenchable fire" of the Holy Spirit is meant to burn away.
Holy Spirit and fire	The elements associated with salvific baptism in Christ that are meant to purify, purge, transform, and make a person new and powerful, enabling them to transform the world.
John the Baptist	A preacher who appeared in the desert of Judea calling people to repent for the coming kingdom of heaven. He baptized with water for repentance and prophesied that a mightier one would come after him to baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire.
Lead, Kindly Light	A poem written by John Henry Cardinal Newman in 1832. It serves as a prayer and a proclamation of trust in the light and love of God.
Light of Christ	The divine illumination from Jesus that perfects the human intellect. It is the source of truth, dispels spiritual darkness, and strengthens the intellect to see God's essence, acting as a faculty <i>by which</i> God is seen rather than a medium.
Metanoia	A deep and radical change in one's thinking and behavior that goes beyond simply being sorry for sins. It is a profound internal transformation whose fruit is "the peace that surpasses understanding."
Similitude	A term defined in the text as "the quality or state of being like something." St. Thomas Aquinas taught the light of Christ is not a similitude in which God is seen.
Unquenchable fire	A metaphor for the power of the Holy Spirit that purges and purifies the hearts and minds of believers by burning away the "chaff" of sin.