

CHRIST THE KING LUTHERAN CHURCH

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SECOND SUNDAY IN ADVENT

December 7, 2025

Isaiah 11: 1-10; Psalm 72: 1-7, 18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Saint Matthew 3: 1-12

In nomine Jesu!

Today's Scripture texts with Isaiah on the one hand, John the Baptist on the other, and Paul in the middle, along with our current times, remind me of a story Ronald Reagan loved to tell. You might remember this:

There were these parents with twin sons who worried them deeply. One was an extreme pessimist; the other optimist. They took the boys to a child psychiatrist who said, "I can fix that. We'll get two rooms and put each boy in one of them. The first we'll fill with the most wonderful toys, put the pessimist in and when he finds out they're for him, he'll get over being a pessimist."

"What about the optimist?" the parents asked. "Well," replied the doctor, "I have a friend, and he has a stable and they clean out the stalls every day. I can get quite an amount of that stuff. We'll put that in another room, and when the optimist goes into that room and finds out it's for him, he'll get over being an optimist."

So, they did that and, after about 5 minutes, they entered the room full of toys and found the pessimist huddled in a corner, bawling his eyes out. "I know these are going to be taken from me or, if I touch them, I'm going to break them," he sobbed.

Entering the other room, they found the optimist, happy as a clam, diving in dung, whooping, laughing, and shouting, "There's got to be a pony in here somewhere!"

Whatever we think of our current context, (I think we all know what we think) the context for those who first heard Isaiah, John the Baptist, and Paul the Apostle's was at least as bad for them as a room of manure.

Emerging from the wilderness, catching their first view of what their ancestors described as a land of milk and honey and of their glorious city, Jerusalem and its marvelous temple -- all no more than useless rubble, Isaiah's late Fourth Century BCE hearers -- leaderless, impoverished exiles -- must have thought this prophet Isaiah was as crazy that dung diving, whooping boy shouting "there must be a pony in here somewhere!" as they heard him announce that in that God was in that rubble preparing for them an unimaginably great future of unparalleled peace and prosperity adorned with global respect and honor under the just and equitable rule of one "from the root of Jesse" -- a royal family

line they were certain was no more. Maybe, you think Isaiah's message is dangerously deluded too.

As they gathered at the River "from Jerusalem, Judea, and all the surrounding region," John the Baptist's hearers, particularly those constantly wary, self-protective, well-to-do" collaborators with the imperial Roman police state, the "Pharisees and Sadducees" – John the Baptist's hearers must have thought him dangerously deluded as he called them to repent of their furtive fretting that "everything is about to be taken away from them and broken" and their silent cooperation with the evil that surrounds them. Maybe, you think John the Baptist's message is dangerously deluded too.

Whatever we think about our time and these messengers, today's texts invite us to examine ourselves in the growing brightness of Christ's presence. Are we like those "Pharisees and Sadducees," silently self-protective, surrounded by all our toys and goodies? Or are we like those returning exiles, beholding only devastation, and seeing ourselves, as the saying goes, in hopelessly deep doodoo? Are we striving toward God's promise of justice, equity, harmony, and peace? Or are we "fleeing the coming wrath"?

Whatever we think of our time and these ancient stories, Paul reminds us that they "are written for our instruction...so that we might have hope."

Isaiah tells us of God's promised future; "the design of God's love," inviting us to hope for it by living into it.

John the Baptist invites us live baptismally expectant of the One who comes to empower us with "the Holy Spirit and fire;" who comes to us now, to "gather..." embrace, and nourish us – so that like "wheat gathered into the granary" we - "raise[d] up children of Abraham" and "bearing the good fruit of repentance" can gather, nourish, and embrace each and all others, and not simply lie around like lifeless, heartless stones.

Today, that One comes to us and stay with us in whatever room we think we're in. Because, whether we surrounded by toys and goodies or deep in dung, one thing is certain: There *a/ways* is a Savior in here somewhere!" And he is for you!

Amandus J. Derr
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