

*Read also Luke 2:1-7. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

Now the hand of the Lord was stretched out against Israel. The Lord raised adversaries against them—the Arameans on the east, the Philistines on the west, the Assyrians to the north. God did this because God’s children persisted in their resistance—the proud people did not turn to the Lord or seek him. They said, *‘things aren’t that bad. We can handle anything that comes. If our buildings are knocked down, we’ll rebuild them bigger and finer.’* They became godless and their wickedness set their world on fire.

Because their nation had become so divided, they raged against each other. Manasseh and Ephraim devoured one another and then together turned against Judah.

So, their own actions caused the chaos.

Isaiah denounced their laws that exploited the poor and their lusts that consumed their insatiable appetites; and God removed their boundaries and allowed Assyria to plunder them. God swung his ax and lopped off the branches of their giant trees. He reduced his people to kindling. Nothing was left but a stump.

God did it to remove the kingdom of their idols.

In truth, it was a double-edged sword. They did it to themselves because they competitively fought against each other.

It reminds me of a nursery rhyme.

There once were two cats of Kilkenny,  
Each thought there was one cat too many,  
So they fought and they fit,  
And they scratched and they bit,  
Till, excepting their nails  
And the tips of their tails,  
Instead of two cats, there weren't any.

They were sick of each other, and God was sick of them, too. Nevertheless, these were God’s people who needed help and God had a plan for them.

Even though it seems like God’s punishment was to harm them it was really to help them. If God ignored what was going on, they would be gone forever.

It’s like a parent and a child when the child is continuing to follow a wrong path and as hard as it is, sometimes a parent has to say, “That’s enough. We’re calling a halt to this.” That is what God did with Israel when he allowed Assyria to attack.

But then, God stepped in before they were wiped out to keep his nation alive, and God mercifully pulled Assyria off their backs. God took away Assyria’s power.

And this is where our story begins: READ Isaiah 11:1-5

Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot-- yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root. And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. He will delight in obeying the LORD. He will not judge by appearance nor make a decision based on hearsay. He will give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited. The earth will shake at the force of his word, and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked. He will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment.

God himself had cut the stump down. It says that quite clearly. The stump is what's left of Israel after they are decimated by Assyria.

They were fewer in number; but they are also ready to listen.

This remnant that is left seems to have nothing to offer. It's not grand. The stump looks pretty dead. It seems most improbable that something might come of it.

What do you do with it? Grind it up? You might think, well a stump is certainly annoying. It's not going to grow a nice tree.

But when God starts a people, when God has a plan for them, when God makes up his mind, anything God does has a positive, fruitful end.

So out of their problems, out of the stump from which it seemed that nothing would grow; out of their history—from David, an ordinary shepherd from Bethlehem, who became king, down through David's descendants, even when they failed miserably, even when Assyria had defeated them, God made this stump grow new life.

I've heard many people refer to themselves as such a stump, "I've done this or that, I've made this mistake or that and it's ruined my life. How can I possibly live into this new life?"

We learn here that the stump in God's hands produces something magnificent.

We learn here that God has all power to change anything. In God's hands our shortcomings and unlikely circumstances become alive.

Do you have a troubling problem or circumstance that you cannot overcome? In God's hands you will not only live but blossom.

God's stump produced Jesus. It not only blossoms but it provides us with Someone who will do everything we cannot do ourselves. We do not have to live in the failure.

*It's a miracle.*

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God-- not the result of works, so that no one may boast" (Eph 2:8-9).

What is important about this chapter? Hope. We read it every Advent and it gives us great hope.

We talked about a little town—Bethlehem, the city of David, from which the shepherd David came. Little did he know that Jesus, this Savior would be born there. We talked about the people of God who couldn't quite live into their faith yet out of them God produced the real King.

Jesus is filled with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings wisdom, direction, and growing strength.

We learn from Jesus's words. We see what he did. He wasn't defeated by the Pharisees because his Word was forceful. Jesus was righteous and perfect, yet he willingly forgave others, like the woman caught in adultery and the paralyzed man who was let down through the roof. We know that if he forgave them, he forgives us. He healed the sick and encouraged us to pray in the same way. When we accumulate too many riches he tells us riches are not that important. He admonishes us to care for the poor, to give, and to do what's right with our bodies. He wants us to fight for justice and to love our neighbors.

He talks about eternity like it is the most important thing to focus on and plan for.

This is the wisdom that leads to life in our own little "stump."

If you cling to that Word, you have the most positive future.

Let's hear the end result for those who follow Him. READ Isaiah 11:6-9

In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all. The cow will graze near the bear. The cub and the calf will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like a cow. The baby will play safely near the hole of a cobra. Yes, a little child will put its hand in a nest of deadly snakes without harm. Nothing will hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, for as the waters fill the sea, so the earth will be filled with people who know the LORD.

A wolf does not have it in its nature to live with a lamb or a cow with a bear. But, when we live in His capable hands, from our dissension comes peace, reconciliation, and harmony.

God takes his wayward children and God helps them up. God saves them through Jesus and makes something of them – well, not just them—this is talking about you.

His way of doing this seems most improbable, yet it is our greatest hope to see life in our lives.

Do you delight in obeying Him? Follow Jesus. If you cast yourself on him, he will give your stump life, and you will become exceedingly fruitful.

AMEN