

Playing Pretend

Isaiah 11:1–10

Echo Prayer

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The Prophets & Mary & Joseph video

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Today's Bible Reading

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Additional Bible Readings

Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19

Romans 15:4–13

Matthew 3:1–12

God of imagination and all creation, help us to broaden our minds to see your desire for your Kingdom. Open our hearts to allow us to live in harmony with all your people and with all creation. Let us imagine and live into your possibilities. Amen.

“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse” (verse 1). Jesse was King David’s father, so “stump of Jesse” is a reference to kings who followed David. To call that line of rulers a “stump” might have been shocking to those who thought the Davidic line would continue forever. Some scholars understand this reference as an indication that the passage comes from the time when the people of Judah were living in exile in Babylon in the sixth century BCE. It must have seemed that the Davidic dynasty had ended in that national disaster.

Verse 2 promises that God’s Spirit will equip the “shoot” from Jesse’s stump with qualities needed for just rule. The prophet is clear about the power of God’s Spirit and God’s intent for shalom for all creation. There is hope here, not despair. The Hebrew scriptures often link Spirit and the leaders of a community. For example, God’s Spirit possessed Saul on the day of his anointing as king (1 Samuel 10:10). When Samuel anointed David as king, “the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David” (1 Samuel 16:13). God’s Spirit was present in creation (Genesis 1:2). Now God’s Spirit is promised in the transformation of creation that the prophet envisions as coming through a righteous ruler and a peaceable kingdom.

The prophet’s use of animal imagery is striking and hearkens back to the themes of creation and re-creation. Dramatic change is promised. How can we trust that God has the power to effect such change? For Isaiah, God’s power as Creator grounds our hope in transformation – God created all things, and God’s power can renew all things. The prophet pairs

God’s reign, and our role in living into and predator and prey in this peaceable vision as a metaphor of God’s power to renew. What is this passage asking us to do and to be today? How does this passage stir our imaginations to propel us towards God’s peaceable Kingdom?

