

Isaiah 11:1-10

Have you ever lay in a hammock? Describe that event. In 2 words or less, what was it like the last time you were in a hammock.... I once heard a comedian describe a hammock *as a giant net for catching lazy people*. He was right, in that hammocks are a place to relax. And because they are kind of hard to get into or out of, there's not much you can do in them expect relax and be at peace. Some people take hammock along when they go camping. It's a really nice way to relax. Near the trees, out in nature. Suspended between heaven and earth. How glorious! It's making me a little tired just thinking about it, actually.

Today we hear about rest that is ours, but it's not from a hammock, it's from the tree that you might tie a hammock to. To be more specific, that rest comes from a baby tree – from a shoot.

Now you don't have to be a botanist to know that this is kind of a foolish statement. A shoot is one of the most tender things you can find in nature! If you aren't careful, the shoot might break in two or you might damage its tender roots. If you tied a hammock to a shoot, you'd be laying on the ground pretty quickly.

But Isaiah uses that picture to describe for us what our Savior will be like. Not tender and easily breakable, but a source of life, specifically when there was no hope of life before. Our Savior shoot up in life from a seemingly dead stump called the people of Israel. Though the Israelites had rejected him and lived their lives serving themselves instead of God, from that death, life burst forth.

And we have that assurance in our lives as well. On our own, we are as good as dead. We are helpless to obey the Commandments the way God desires. We aren't perfect and we sin every day. We sin when we think ourselves better than others. We sin when we talk about people behind their backs or think mean thoughts about them when they are around. We sin when prioritize entertainment and personal comfort over the spiritual virtues of humility, generosity, and forgiveness that God longs for us to put on display. We sin when we trust in our own strength to get through life, or when we feel that sporadic doses of his life giving word are sufficient for our lives.

We deserve to be dead stumps too, just like Israel – cut down by the judgment of God's wrath. But for us too springs life. For us too, comes a Savior. He was born in Bethlehem – son of a virgin, yet Son of God. He was born to live for us, and lived to die for us. He obeyed in our place and then he bled in our place. The manger quickly gave way to the cross. The cattle that were lowing around his first bed gave way to scoffers and mockers that surrounded his cross. He allowed himself to be suspended between heaven and earth – and he did it so that we could have rest.

In his death and resurrection, we have peace. In his victory, we can celebrate that the war is over for us. The enemy has been defeated, the battle done. Heaven has been purchased for those who have faith that in Bethlehem's manger was found the Way and the Truth and the Life. He is the shoot of Jesse, the life source for his people Israel and all who put their faith in him.

Today we celebrate life. It's the reason that a green Christmas tree stands in most all of your homes and in our church. It's the reason that green circles the Christmas wreath and that it runs up staircases and around door thresholds. It reminds us of the new life that has sprung up in us through Jesus.

Today we'll look at that sign of life – a Christmas tree - and we'll learn a few things about the

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decorations we often put on it. The tree itself and its decorations teach us about the peace we have in Jesus – the shoot from the stump of Jesse.

Listen to the amazing and miraculous peace that is yours in Jesus. Listen to the awesome promise of peace that our God makes to us, and trust that this is God’s promise to you as well. May he grant you and your families comfort and hope and peace this Christmas and throughout the year!

- ¹ A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.*
- ² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of power,
the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—*
- ³ and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;*
- ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.*
- ⁵ Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.*
- ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.*
- ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.*
- ⁸ The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,
and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest.*
- ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.*
- ¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him,
and his place of rest will be glorious.*

Sit back as the children lead us in worship today and put before our eyes the real meaning of Christmas.

We’ll begin with the hymn that is printed in your service folder. Oh Come Little Children