

God's unexpected...a green shoot from an old stump

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The scripture comes from the prophet Isaiah, who lived some 500-600 years before Jesus' birth. Isaiah is a prophet of the messiah, a prophet who more than perhaps any other looks forward to that time when God would come to be among us...when God's savior would come into the world. Isaiah is the prophet who says "a virgin will conceive, and a young woman will give birth...and we will call his name Emmanuel". He says "unto us a son is given, unto us a child is born". Isaiah also predicts how Jesus will die...in such graphic and accurate detail that many felt that the 53rd chapter had to have been written long after Isaiah because it gave such a detailed description of crucifixion.

And here we have another passage that speak of the coming of God's messiah...but this one is different. Here we read of God's great surprise...God's change up pitch!

The people had hoped for a messiah in the line and house of king David. David was the best and most popular king. He had defeated the enemies of the people and of God...remember that giant named Goliath? King David had brought the people together and had brought them great renown throughout the region. Kings and Queens from across the known world brought tribute to David and his son Solomon. It was the golden age of Israel, when they were the top player on the world stage. The people lived in relative peace and prosperity and their king was powerful and well respected.

But David's house had been cut off. The house of David was no more. These noble kings had squandered their inheritance and they no longer served as God's agents of justice or compassion. They did not reign with God's help and power. In fact, the kingdoms had fallen...the northern kingdom to the Assyrians and

the southern kingdom to the Babylonians. They had been taken into exile and now had no king at all. King David and Solomon's royal tree had been cut off, and all there was now was a stump of the once great tree...cut off and dried up.

But God is not limited to our expectations. Our reality and God's reality are different, thanks be to God. Out of the old stump, a new shoot emerges. A tender branch struggles forth, a green sprig grows from the old, dead, dried up promise of the past.

From nothing, God brings forth something new. And what a something!

The messiah that is coming would turn everything on its head! He would come from David's house, but he would not be like king David. He would be better. He would not be a military ruler who wins the people's freedom in battle..he would rule in the strength and power of God's word.

He will change everything. He will judge the people...but not based on what he sees with his own eyes or hears with his own ears...but rather with the true righteousness from the Word of God he will give power to the poor.

He will turn everything upside down. He will usher in a time of God's salvation. The lion and the lamb will lie down together, the leopard will change its spots...and the whole world will live in peace. He will have the spirit of the Lord upon him. He will have the spirit of Wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and power, of knowledge and reverence of God....

It is reminiscent of another verse in Isaiah 61: where the Spirit of the Lord is upon the Lord's messiah...and he has anointed him to bring good news to the poor , to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim sight to the blind, freedom to the captive and release

from darkness to the captives and to proclaim the year of God's favor and that the salvation of God is at hand!

The Root of Jesse will put forth a shoot...the stump will send out a tender new branch. This is the message of Christmas today. That the Lord is doing a new thing.

Roots, stumps, spindly green shoots, tender new branches - none of these images are big, flashy, or impressive in any worldly way. They are instead small, simple signs of life and hope and the divine presence in the midst of the people.