Second Sunday of Advent
Cycle A RCL
Revised

Isaiah 11:1-10
Isaiah of Jerusalem functioned as a court prophet from “the year that King Uzziah died” (6:1; 742 BCE) until after Sennacherib’s unsuccessful siege of Jerusalem (701 BCE). The setting of his call to prophetic ministry (6:1-13) suggests that he may also have served as a priest. Dating Isaiah 11:1-10 has always presented peculiar challenges. The reference to the “stump of Jesse” in 11:1 could be a reference to the ending of the Davidic kingship by the Babylonians in 586 BCE; but not all scholars agree, for 11:1-5 reads very much like a royal psalm from before the exile. The vision of the “peaceable kingdom” in 11:6-9 resembles post-exilic visions like Habakkuk 2:14 and Isaiah 65:25 and we should date Isaiah 11:1-10 with them. This hymn and Isaiah 9:2-7 both express cogently the messianic idealism associated with Judah’s institution of kingship. The lectionary adds verse 10 to the reading, but that verse belongs with what follows.

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19
This royal psalm was either a coronation hymn or a hymn sung in commemoration of the king’s coronation. The late ascription “To Solomon” in the first verse of the Hebrew text (not reproduced in the BCP) lacks adequate explanation since Solomon never engaged in warfare. “The River” (72:8) refers to the Euphrates River. The Phoenicians founded Tarshish (72:10) as a copper smelter on the SW coast of Spain. Sheba designates a region in southern Arabia, and Seba probably refers to a site in Ethiopia (72:10). By omitting 72:8-17, the lectionary has avoided the violent imagery of the psalm (72:9-11) but has also eliminated verses that emphasize the king’s responsibility for social justice (72:12-14).

Romans 15:4-13
The church in Rome was demographically different from other churches Paul addressed because of the large numbers of Jews who belonged to it. In Romans, therefore, Jewish-Gentile issues have a prominent place. Here Paul reminds Jewish Christians of the scriptural basis for the Gentile mission, and he reminds Gentiles of their origins in Judaism and in Jewish scripture.

Matthew 3:1-12
Drawn from Mark and the sayings-source Q (sayings material we find in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke but not in Mark), Luke 3:7 has John address his “Brood of Vipers” speech to all who come for Baptism, whereas Matthew restricts it to the Pharisees and Sadducees (3:7), the two principal religious/political parties of first-century Palestine with whom Jesus constantly struggled throughout his ministry.

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