

remind you that though Christ has come, the viper will in fact kill you and the lion will not eat with us, but will eat us. So what was Isaiah doing?

I suggest to you that Isaiah is not talking about divine behavioral modifications, because the changes he is suggesting go right to the core of who these animals are. Lions with sharp teeth and claws eat meat; eating hay is no little shift, but a complete overhaul of their being. And to be able to imagine this vision of the day of the Lord with Isaiah, we have to be willing to imagine not only these animals doing things that animals aren't supposed to do, we have to be willing to understand the same thing of ourselves. You see, Isaiah uses animals because they are easier images than people. They allow him to paint the contrast so vividly of opposites, even enemies being brought into relation that we are left to think about the oppositions and relations into which we might be brought.

Isaiah gives you and me the freedom to start lining things up that don't go together. Try it when you walk down the street—the protestor and the police officer, the atheist and the fundamentalist, the rich and the poor, the liberal and the conservative. For when we start to imagine the opposites in our world not being so starkly opposites, then we open ourselves at

long last to a particular sort of thinking about the most important one of these oppositions of all. We can start thinking about ourselves and God. For in between the two we know there is a gap of imperfection, sin, and limitedness that separates us from the creating, sustaining, being that is God. Then we can start to imagine that God might participate in your skin and mine, in your life and mine—that divinity and humanity might come crashing together in a way that is impossible for them both. The very mystery of the Incarnation and its consequences opens before us.

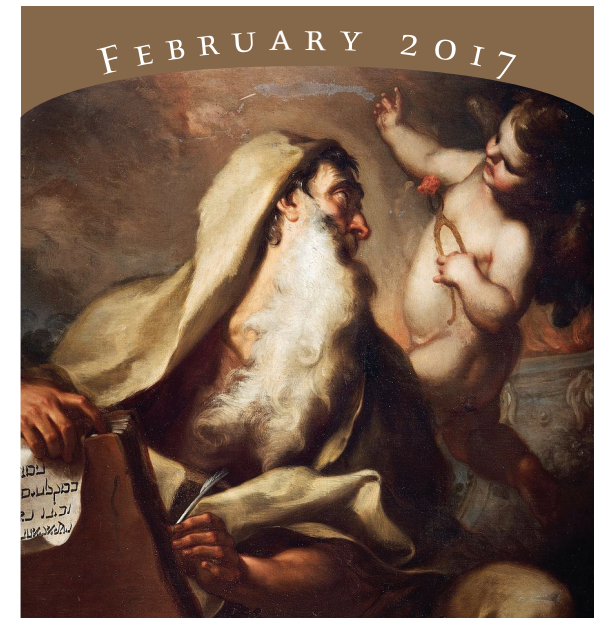
I suggest to you that there is a wonderful danger in beginning to imagine a world with teachers like the prophet Isaiah. The very act of thinking in this way will break apart the lines of possibility we have drawn for ourselves and our neighbors—and viper and child, lion and bear, panther and kid, help get us there. This is not a flight into fancy—Isaiah knew lions ate cows—but a daily exercise.

The greatest opposition has fallen apart in Christ. As the fathers of the Church used to say, the Son of God became man so that we humans might become divine. We open our hearts to the prophets in order to renew our vision and hope for our own transformation. It is an education in the faith from the greatest of teachers.

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MONTHLY REFLECTION SERIES

Educators in the Faith

Learning with the Prophets

Fr. Kevin Grove, C.S.C.

At Mass, we sometimes pass too quickly over the first reading from one of the prophets. These prophets can be seemingly distant figures from a time so long before us it is hard to feel at home in their words. It is worth our taking a second look this month at prophets. After all, every baptized Catholic is anointed to share in Christ's offices of priest, prophet, and king. Prophets are teachers. Christ is the fulfillment of prophecy and thus of teaching. You and I, as the baptized in Christ, are to be teachers, too.

“ **A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom.** ”

Great teachers help their students not only to learn subject matter, but to think differently. And when we as students have completed a course from a truly great teacher, our thought patterns have changed so much that we cannot be the same. Prophets work this way, too. They

see a world that is different, made new right from the stuff of what is around us. And one valid way to approach them is examine the data of their prophecy: who is speaking, what is the message, and what is its application? But, there is more to our prophets. They are pointing us to Christ by teaching us to think differently about the world we see with our eyes. To go with them we have to use our imaginations a bit, but that's what they intended. So, let's use the prophet Isaiah as an example. Just a few well-known verses make the point:

But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.
The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:
a spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
a spirit of counsel and of strength,
a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD,
and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.

Not by appearance shall he judge,
nor by hearsay shall he decide,
But he shall judge the poor with justice,
and decide fairly for the land's afflicted.
He shall strike the ruthless with

the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.
Justice shall be the band around his waist,
and faithfulness a belt upon his hips.

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb,
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat;
The calf and the young lion shall browse together,
with a little child to guide them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
together their young shall lie down;
the lion shall eat hay like the ox.
The baby shall play by the viper's den,
and the child lay his hand on the adder's lair.
They shall not harm or destroy on all my holy mountain;
for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the LORD,
as water covers the sea. (Isaiah II)

Isaiah's famous passage delivers a promise of life from the stump, the ended line of Jesse. Not only will this shoot bring life, but it will be a person endowed with the seven gifts, as we have come to describe them, of the Holy Spirit—wisdom, understanding, wonder and awe, knowledge, counsel, fortitude,

and piety. But this shoot from the stump of Jesse, endowed with gifts of the Spirit, is also going to cause a shift in reality.



The reality Isaiah gives us is a whole sequence of images that don't go together. Wolf lives with lamb. Leopard lies down with the little goat. Calf and lion eat together with a little boy to lead them. And the cow and the bear shall graze, or more literally make friends. This is not reality. Isaiah is imagining things. He is a prophet of the absurd, right? The wolf eats the lamb; the leopard stalks the baby goat; the lion eats both the calf and the boy; and cows and bears will never be concerned about eating together in friendship. Ancient Hebrew listeners just had to look around to see Isaiah was off. Nevertheless, the prophet continues. The lion eats hay like the ox and the young child is able to play at the viper's den and the adder's lair. Now, I need not