

There is a popular Christmas card with a reproduction of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Philadelphia Quaker painter Edward Hicks scene titled “The Peaceable Kingdom.” The foreground of Hick’s painting illustrates the text of today’s first reading from the prophet Isaiah, chapter 11: “then the wolf will be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid (goat); the calf and the lion shall browse together.”

Isaiah delivered this message at a low point in the history of God’s chosen people, when they were being besieged by their enemies about 700 years before Christ. Isaiah gives the Lord’s promise that a shoot, new life, would sprout from the stump of King David’s royal line, giving hope to his people for peace and harmony among all people. Even natural enemies like the wolf and the lamb would be friends.

This shoot or offspring would receive God’s gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength (fortitude), knowledge, and fear of the Lord. He would be the long awaited Messiah, whom we believe came to us as Jesus of Nazareth.

In today’s Gospel, John the Baptist appears, attracting large crowds, as he also preaches about the coming Messiah. He tells the people that they must repent, that is turn away from their sins and faults, embrace God, and live by his commandments. As a sign of the people’s willingness to repent, he baptized them in the Jordan River.

John was particularly stern with the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to hear him, perhaps to spy on him. He rails against their hypocrisy, urging them to produce good fruit, i.e. good works as evidence of their sincerity. John tells everyone not to rest on their venerable Jewish heritage.

John’s message applies to us as well. We too are urged to live good decent honest and charitable lives. It is not good enough for us to be cultural Catholics. We must be committed disciples of the Lord Jesus.

**We too have been baptized but with a greater baptism than John's, as he humbly admits. We have been baptized with the fire, the energy of the Holy Spirit. This enables us to live our faith strongly. This baptismal grace needs to be cared for and renewed constantly. It can be tainted by human weakness and sins. Gratefully, we have recourse to another sacrament, often referred to as "another baptism," in the sacrament of Reconciliation, Penance, or Confession. Please plan to make celebrating this sacrament as one of your "to do" things in preparation for Christmas.**

**In this contentious time in our nation and world, we pray for the coming of the peaceable kingdom of Isaiah and the grace to accept the renewal message of John the Baptist, which will lead us to a deeper union with our Messiah and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.**