

ISAIAH 11:1-9
WHAT KIND OF MAN...?

How does it feel to be a guest? Were you made to feel welcome or unwelcome? Good friends invited you to stay with them for a few days, people you've known for years and so you went to stay with them and they were glad to see you and made you feel at home; their welcome is real and sincere and feels good to be a guest in their house; it is the kind of welcome that allows you to take off your shoes and not worry about the holes in your socks.. But it can be different: you can be invited to be the guest of people you don't really know; perhaps you met them on holiday and they followed that up with an invitation to a meal or to stay. You can be guest of someone who invites you because they want to say they've invited so and so, just to drop your name into their conversation; then you feel most unwelcome, because the welcome is superficial and false. Some VIPs are invited as guests to special occasions and a great deal of work goes into the preparation for their visit, but they sometimes feel that the welcome they're given is shallow and superficial at times.

I wonder how Jesus felt when, as adult, He began to exercise His ministry. He met people who were genuinely pleased to see Him and meet Him and recognise Him as the Messiah. They saw who and what He was, what he had come to be and do and they rejoiced to see Him; they treated Him with warmth and love and welcomed Him with faith in their hearts. Others were exactly the opposite: they refused to see Him for who he was and nothing He would say or do would change their attitude and they ended up plotting His death. They saw Him as no more than a trouble-maker, a problem to be got rid of. The Jews had been waiting for generations for their Messiah, but in some ways they didn't know what to expect; they had the prophecies and the pictures, but there was still a huge unknown; they expected and anticipated, but they also were full of fear.

Then there was whole other part of world for which Jesus also came as *the Light of World* – the Gentiles, the nations, everything that was not Jewish! They had no sense of anticipation or expectancy at all. Indeed, during His ministry, Jesus only met an occasional Gentile. Only later, when the Church began to tell the stories of Jesus and preach the gospel across the world did Gentiles in large numbers have any contact with Jesus. Some listened to the gospel with eager, open hearts and embraced it and believed in Jesus gladly; others thought that it was silly nonsense! It is same with us and in our world: when we consider Jesus and the gospel, people have a choice: to welcome Jesus with open arms, with open hearts, with faith and trust; or to hold Him at arms length, give Him respect but from a distance, perhaps; or to dismiss Him completely, to consider the gospel as silly nonsense. All of these reactions to Jesus are around: the guest received with a genuine, real, sincere welcome; or made to feel unwelcome?

Let's go back 800 years to Isaiah chapter 11. A few years ago there was a sticker at Christmas: "wise men worshipped Jesus; wise people still do". I like that, because it recognises the quality that we see in Jesus. Welcoming Jesus into the world, believing in Jesus now as Christians do, is not a silly thing to do, but we do it because we recognise that Jesus is at the very least a quality human being. He is more than that: He is also the Son of God, but at least we see that He has qualities to be admired, that He is someone to be admired, revered, trusted, followed, even imitated. 800 years before He came, Isaiah was privileged to 'see' something of this quality person; he was given insight into the royal Messiah who would come and he rejoiced to see Jesus. There are all kinds of things said about the Messiah here, but the overwhelming impression is of the quality person who will be the Messiah. He is a person to welcome, believe in, trust.

Isaiah 11 begins, not with a person, but with a stump. Yes, a tree stump! Jesse is the father of David, the great King. It started with the judgement God exercised on Israel and the nation being taken away into exile, and all seemed lost; the nation's life had come to a very sticky end. The tree had been cut down as it were; the cut down tree seems dead. But that is not case: the tree is cut down, but there will be a new life that comes from the stump: "A shoot..." (11:1) Have you read Jesus' family tree? It's there twice in the New Testament; Matthew and Luke both have a version of it, albeit slightly different versions; both of them trace His ancestral line back to David and then back beyond him; so humanly speaking, Jesus is out of the family line of David. So Joseph had to go to Bethlehem because he "*belonged to house and line of David*" But in another sense too, Jesus is from the stump of David: He will be a King in the pattern of David. As David was Israel's greatest King, so he will be surpassed by the Royal Messiah who will come to succeed him. Jesus will follow David and be even greater. Jesus walks in David's footsteps and then goes on to supersede them a million times over.

Isaiah shows us six qualities, all inspired by the Spirit of God: "*the Spirit...*" (11:2) These six qualities come in three pairs:

Wisdom and understanding: the Royal Messiah will know things; He will have the power to see to the heart of an issue, so later "*He will...*" (11:3f) He will understand why people behave in way they do; He will understand human nature; He will understand the will of God in a way that no-one else is able to do and He will make good choices based on what he understands.

Counsel and power He will have "the ability to devise a right course of action coupled with the personal prowess to see it through." (Motyer)

Knowledge and the fear of the Lord He will know things, especially the truth; most of all He will know God intimately and knowing God will produce in Him a reverence for God that will shape His whole life; His reverence for God will give Him the passion and desire to do the will of God all through His life.

Here is a real quality human being. Who would not welcome this man? Here is a real quality human being!

The coming of this royal messiah will have consequences, huge consequences:

For the people He will meet: here is someone who will help people in need, who will treat people equally and fairly, who will deal with people in ways that are right and good; He will be faithful to His promises, faithful to His God-given mission as the Saviour of the world.

For the whole of creation: Isaiah paints this wonderful picture of a new kind of world, a new creation where all the old enmities are gone: "*the wolf...*" (11:6) and where all is peace and tranquillity; the whole curse of creation in Genesis 3, where it was set against itself because of Adam's sin, is lifted and all is perfect peace once more; all because the Messiah has come.

For the nations: the whole world will feel the impact of the Messiah's coming: "*He will...*" (11:12) More than just Israel will welcome the Messiah, but He will draw people from all over the world; people from every tribe and nation will be drawn to Jesus by the preaching of the gospel; people from every nation will welcome Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.

The season of Advent is all about waiting for and welcoming this Messiah. Jesus did not come to the world as a guest, as if an outsider come to visit; He came to the world as its Lord and He came to the world as one of us. These two themes go all the way through the Bible when it talks about the coming of Jesus, that on the one hand He is the God-given Saviour and Lord, the Messiah, the Chosen one come from God to save the world; on other hand, He is One of us, a real human being and indeed

from what we see here, the model human being, the ideal man, come to inspire us by showing us what we might yet be and what God actually intended us to be. Advent is about waiting for and welcoming and still waiting for this Jesus; He has come 2000 years ago in Bethlehem, but part of the Christian celebration of Advent is that He is still the long-awaited Saviour who will come again to world and when He comes again it will be trailing clouds of glory and to create a new heaven and new earth for ever.

What kind of welcome will we give this Jesus? As we've said there is a whole range of answers to that question: some people would give Jesus no room whatsoever in their thinking about life; others admire Him from a distance because they see the quality of the person. Still others welcome Him gladly and come to Him with faith and trust. There is one more kind of welcome that probably is the best and strongest kind of welcome that we can give to Jesus: you know the proverb "Imitation is sincerest form of flattery"? Well, without suggesting that Jesus wants our flattery, nonetheless the strongest response we can make to Jesus is to learn to be like Him. In particular, the six qualities that we have admired about Jesus from Isaiah 11, these qualities can be ours and we can learn to be like Jesus. Most of all, we can learn that the highest attainment in life is the quality of person that we become. The highest and best attainment for us is to become more and more like Jesus in kind of people that we are.

Wisdom and understanding: Gain insight into life; see to heart of issues rather than a superficial understanding; gain the ability to make good and right choices and respond and react to situations and people in good way. *Counsel and power:* have the wit to devise the right course of action and the strength to see it through. *Knowledge and fear of Lord:* how much did Jesus know instinctively and how much did He learn? He certainly grew in wisdom and so too do we; but this doesn't happen by accident. We will learn to know God and know the truth and develop reverence for God by reading the Bible and by prayer and by working at it. Here's another list: "*The fruit ...*" (Gal 5:22f) This is all about the kind of people that we are; nine qualities to pursue; nine qualities that, when we have them, make us people like Jesus; He had these nine qualities perfectly as a result of the influence and work of Spirit on Him. The Spirit's work in us and His influence on us is to make us more and more like Jesus, more and more like this.

What is the best welcome we give to the Messiah? To love Him with a sincere love; to trust Him with a real sense of faith and trust; to learn to be like Him. Jesus came as a quality human being; a person of genuine quality, a person to admire for His qualities, person to love and trust because of His qualities; a person to imitate, to want to be like Him, to want to have these qualities for ourselves. The world measures us by what we have, what we own, our wealth and possessions; Jesus measures us by what we are, the kind of people we are, the quality of our life. Learn to be wise and understanding of situations and people; pray for the ability to make good plans and the strength to see them through; get to know the truth, get to know God and learn a deep sense of reverence. Take these lists away; read them again and again; pray for these qualities; work to be like Jesus.