

**Homily for December 5, 2004  
Second Sunday of Advent – 2004 A Cycle**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Isaiah 11:1-10  
Romans 15:4-9  
Matthew 3:1-12**

## *Dare we opt for a vision of the future promised by God, a new creation?*

“The baby shall play by the cobra’s den...There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea,” proclaims Isaiah chapter 11.

The world into which Isaiah proclaimed his prophecy, in the eighth century before Christ, was one of danger, harm and ruin. The social, religious and political cultures of Israel and Judah were in decline, and the enemy was at the gates. Israel was like a child playing unaware by the cobra’s den. But it was crucial for Isaiah and for all the faithful of Israel to maintain the vision of God’s saving power. Just as God rescued Israel from slavery in Egypt, God would again rescue them from what would become the Babylonian Captivity.

The passage from Isaiah seems to have been intended for people of faith who stand “between the times.” They have been part of the shame and humiliation of the exile. They know how it feels to be lost, cast about without any real place they can call their own. They have drifted through life with only a vague memory of how it was to be safely in the care of the Lord.

The passage points to the coming of a time at which a new order will be established – a new king, who judges on the basis of righteousness, is coming to re-establish the kingdom that the people of Israel were promised as long as they kept the covenant with God made by their forebearers centuries before. This is a victory song of hope to a people who had forgotten what hope felt like.

For ourselves, when we feel as though we’re in exile – says the passage – far away from all that we value and love, God keeps a watchful eye on the covenant people of faith. The word points to better times ahead as long as we remain faithful to the covenant we undertake when we become members of the community of faith.

Advent is the season of waiting in joyful hope. It is essential that believers constantly envision that for which they hope. Isaiah took all that was wrong with Israel and turned it around, forming an image of what kind of salvation God would bring. It was a matter of focusing attention not on what was wrong with the world, but what was right with God.

For us today, our hope and our expectations are to be based on the “knowledge of the Lord.” God is always faithful to fulfilling the promise – to rescue the people of the covenant from the hands of their enemies and to

save the people of the New Covenant from sin and death. That is the fulfillment for which we wait.

A week from this Monday, we shall celebrate our Advent Reconciliation Service – an opportunity to invite God’s future to draw near, not by engineering it, but by naming and claiming our need, our unloving choices, our powerlessness – and receiving in turn God’s promise of hope reaffirmed for each of us. Extra confessors will be available, and amid music and prayer, we shall wait in hope for the inevitable invasion of God – promised centuries ago, affirmed in Jesus’ death and resurrection, and drawing ever nearer. Do come, if you can, and touch the future so real that the troubles of the present are swallowed up in Christ’s victory.

“Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; the calf and the young lion shall browse together...the baby shall play by the cobra’s den...There shall be no harm or ruin on all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as water covers the sea.”

“The Peaceable Kingdom,” a print by the German-born illustrator Fritz Eichenberg, is one of many artistic representations of this passage from Isaiah. We see animals that are natural enemies sitting together peacefully under the widespread branches of a sheltering tree: a lion, a bear, a cheetah, a wolf and a snake, along with lambs, a rabbit and a small child in their midst. When we consider the reality of the world of which we are a part, we might wonder: Is this scene

merely a fanciful myth? An impossible dream? Or might it be a vision of our future, promised by God? I opt for the vision of the future promised by God – a new creation.

Dare we opt for a vision of the future promised by God, a new creation?