

“The Visitation” Isaiah 11:1-6 The Visitation of Mary 2022

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

This passage seems to be chosen for the Day of Visitation because it speaks about the Shoot from the stump of Jesse. This Shoot, also called the Branch, is Christ Jesus, who came forth in the fullness of time in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Thus, we see Mary visit Elizabeth with the Lord in her womb, arising from the line of David’s father, Jesse.

The holy prophet Isaiah goes on to speak about the Spirit of Yahweh who rests upon Christ, the Branch. This is the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

These attributes of the Holy Spirit show the intention of the coming of Christ. They show the mercy and grace of God in sending His Son by His divine plan to redeem us.

But there is another reference and attribute of the Spirit that may be missed. In verse four it says, “He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall kill the wicked.”

If you have been really paying attention, you might be thinking, “Wait, Pastor, the word ‘Spirit’ is not mentioned in that passage at all.”

You are right as far as the English translation goes. But in Hebrew, the word “breath” is actually the word for “Spirit”. The exact same word was used four times in verse two and is translated as “Spirit” each time. In the Greek version, it is precisely the same situation.

Now, it is true that the word in both Hebrew and Greek can be translated as “wind” or “breath”. Sometimes the context clearly calls for one or the other. Here in Isaiah eleven, four, it seems natural to think that breath comes out of a person’s mouth and lips. So all the English translations I have seen read, “With the breath of His lips He

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shall slay the wicked,” or something similar. “Breath” is always the word used.

But if the translation is based on what is naturally expected to come out of someone’s mouth, then why is there a rod coming out of the Messiah’s mouth just before this? You would not expect a rod or staff to come flailing out of someone’s throat. That is certainly not natural. It is even less natural when the Branch from Jesse strikes the earth with the rod from His mouth.

In any case, what does this passage mean? What are the rod and Spirit or breath? They are the Word which flies out of the mouth of Christ. That Word is always accompanied by the Spirit. So, in a way, I am insisting on a particular translation that makes little difference. The breath could certainly symbolize the Spirit, which is a bit awkward, since the Person is being symbolized by a word that is literally His Name. But let that pass. The meaning should be clear. The Word of Christ that proceeds from His mouth is always full and powerful with the Spirit.

I suppose the other option is that Isaiah meant the word “breath” literally, as if the Messiah was like the big bad wolf, who slays the wicked with the huffing and puffing of His strong lungs. But that is silly.

Even if we recognize that one way or another, the breath is the Spirit, we are still left with this quandary. The Spirit that proceeds from Christ kills the wicked. That does not sound like the nice loving Spirit of God. He is gentle and merciful. He would not go around slaying. Yes, God the Father is wrathful and slays the wicked sometimes, but the Holy Spirit is all gentle and nice.

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Well, no, that is not true. The Father is not the only one who is angry about sin. The Son and the Spirit share the just nature of the Godhead, and so they also must punish the wicked.

All three Persons love to show love and mercy. That is their primary nature, their proper work. Notice that the Spirit has all kinds of attributes that are gracious: He does not judge by what His eyes see or decide disputes by what His ears hear. Instead, He judges the poor with righteousness and decides with equity for the meek of the earth. This is what the Branch from Jesse does as He gives salvation based on His own righteousness and atonement. He does these works in unity with the Spirit. The Spirit, like Christ, is full of mercy and grace, and desires that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of salvation.

But the Spirit cannot deny justice. That would make Him into a corrupt, crooked judge. So, the wicked who will not turn to Christ in repentance will be slain in the end. That is the harsh truth.

These things are happening now. The Spirit is coming through preaching and the Word at this moment. He delights in those who have the fear of the Lord. He sheds upon us wisdom and understanding. He opens our eyes to the counsel and might of God in saving us by His Son. The Spirit shows us the knowledge of Christ and leads us to fear God with the proper respect of children for our heavenly Father.

But if we do not heed the Spirit’s voice in this Word and preaching, then we must receive His other, alien work. He will smite all those who disdain the mercy of God. If they will have no part in His salvation, then He will grant their wish. He will allow them to stand upon their own works and judge them by what He sees in their lives. That is, He will condemn them as sinners and give them the harshest punishment possible.

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The Lord keeps us in faith so that this never happens to us. Instead, we will enjoy the wise planning of the Almighty. He has brought us to salvation by His Spirit as we trust in His Son’s death and resurrection. He has preserved us in faith and will continue to defend us against the assaults of the evil one. And He will bring us to the resurrection from the dead and the life everlasting. Amen.