

Isaiah's Portraits of Christ

By Author Unknown

[Third continuation of a paper on portraits of Christ in the Old Testament begun in November 1926 and read before the Wisconsin State Teachers' Conference.]

It is my intention to present to this esteemed conference portraits of Jesus as we find them in the book of the prophet Isaiah. This paper is the third in a series begun in November of the year 1926 on the topic: Portraits of Christ in the Old Testament. In the course of the six years which have passed since I first appeared before you, a number of teachers have joined your conference. For their sake I ask the rest of you, who have heard the first two papers, to bear with me if I preface my discussion with a few remarks on the object of these papers. Seven years ago the question was raised in this conference, to what extent a devout Jew in Old Testament times may have been able to visualize the Savior from the Messianic prophesies then in existence. Out of this question there developed the request for a paper on this topic. The discussion of it has taken us through the most important prophecies from the dawn of history to the days of King David and to some of the outstanding prophecies in the Psalms. At the close of my last paper I stated that there still remained some psalms containing prophecies of our Lord. But at the present time I feel that your conference might prefer to enter with me the vast field of prophecies which lies spread out before us in the book of Isaiah, the greatest of all prophets.

As an aid to the fuller understanding of the prophetic portions of his book we shall hear a brief outline of the life of Isaiah and the contents of his book. Isaiah appears to have attained a very high age. Among oriental Christians there is a tradition, according to which he lived to be 120 years old. It is more probable, however, that he died at the age of 88 or ninety. His period of office as a prophet is reckoned at 47 years, from 759-713 B.C. This was during the time of the Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. He was a contemporary of two other prophets, Hosea and Micha. We have very few details concerning his life. It appears that he spent most of it in the city of Jerusalem. During the reign of wicked Ahaz he steps into prominence as the mighty representative of God, but his counsel and warnings were disregarded by this ruler. Hezekiah, successor to Ahaz, on the other hand, recognized him as a man of God and accepted his counsel. Finally we find a report in the Talmud and in the church fathers that Isaiah died a violent death during the reign of cruel King Manasseh. It is believed that the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews had his death in mind when he writes in the 37. verse of the 11. chapter: "They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword." In II Kings, 22, 16, we read: "Moreover Manasseh shed innocent blood very much, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another." No doubt these innocently murdered people were citizens who abhorred the idolatry introduced by Manasseh, including the prophets. Isaiah may well have been among these, although he had retired from the active work on account of his high age and was therefore not mentioned by name.

After his death he was regarded with ever increasing esteem as one after the other of his prophecies was fulfilled. Thus Josephus declares that the fulfillment of the prophecy regarding Cyrus and his relations to Israel persuaded this monarch to accept the God of Israel as his God, to give freedom to the Jews and to aid in the restoration of the temple. But the honor and renown of our prophet reached its highest peak when it had become evident that in Jesus of Nazareth all the prophecies concerning the Messiah of the Jews had been fulfilled. The entire New Testament is permeated with actual references to his prophecies or with words and thoughts taken from them.

The office of Isaiah, as of all prophets, included a two-fold duty: both to make the people of his day God-conscious in their social, political and religious life, and to predict future happenings. Thus, on the one hand he emphasized the foundation of the Old Covenant, namely the law. But he insisted that the spirit of the law must be considered rather than the mere letter. The burden of his teachings may be summed up as follows: "God alone deserves honor, man on the other hand, deserves to be filled with a sense of shame and disgrace. Human trust must be placed in the Creator, not in His creatures. All help in bodily and spiritual needs comes from Him alone. Every affection and every human endeavor are sinful which are not directed to Him, but

toward the passing things of this life.” Therefore he so often predicts the downfall of the high and mighty, assails most bitterly idolatry and vice in general as signs of outright ingratitude against God and as an offense to His Majesty, and opposes those who, when oppressed by enemies from without, put their hope and trust in alliances with neighboring nations. He insists that all help comes from God, who will never forsake the people of His covenant so long as they are faithful. If unfaithful, however, all their preparations for war and all their alliances will only bring greater disaster upon them. He repeatedly points out that faithfulness toward God and heartfelt trust in Him begets true happiness, while infidelity always begets disaster. He shows how the people itself is to blame for all of its misfortune, whereas God is bounteous in mercy and ever ready to forgive the sins of the people and to deliver it from its adversity, if it will only turn to Him for help.

Now the other side of his duties as a prophet, namely the prediction of future happenings, served as a support and endorsement of his mighty preaching. Thus the predicted destruction of the Kingdom of Israel, the devastation of Judea by Sennacherib, King of Assyria; and the Babylonian Captivity gave weight to Isaiah’s denunciations and admonitions, while the pious among the Jews were comforted by the prophecy concerning the deliverance from the Assyrians and the return from the Babylonian Captivity and encouraged to further faithful service to God. The prophecies against foreign nations pointed out the almighty power of God over against the impotence of all human endeavor and hinted at the futility of putting one’s trust in man.

Outstanding, however, among all of Isaiah’s prophecies are those which speak of a coming Messiah. A scion of the house of David according to his human nature, but at the same time God from eternity, will be born from a virgin, will live, suffer, and die for the redemption of mankind from their sins. After his glorification, his kingdom will be established upon the earth and spread to all the peoples of the world, until the earth shall be full of his glory and his name be known in all the ends thereof. Thus, looking down the centuries, Isaiah has given us the most perfect picture of the history, mission, titles, and characteristics of Christ, of any of the great Hebrew prophets.

May the Spirit of God be with us as we enter upon the examination and discussion of these wondrous portrayals, that they may refresh our souls and strengthen us in our faith.

Two ways of approach are possible. We might take up the Messianic prophecies chapter by chapter, beginning at the first chapter of the book. But by this method we would find it difficult to arrange our studies in an orderly manner. Certain phases of Christ’s person and life would be repeated at irregular intervals and this would tend to confuse rather than to clarify the prophetic view of our Savior. The other method would be to decide beforehand on certain portraits and group about these the respective passages of the book. This latter is the mode of procedure I have chosen particularly since I discovered most helpful outline for this purpose in *The New Chain-Reference Bible* compiled and edited by Frank Charles Thompson. In fact, I purchased this Bible about a year ago because of this outline, expecting to use it for my paper. While I shall not mention quotation marks in the course of the reading, I wish to have it understood that I have acquired a good deal of the material from various sources. Particularly did I use quite extensively E. W. Hengstenberg’s *Christologie des Alten Testaments und Commentar ueber die Weissagungen der Propheten*, an outstanding and monumental work on the Messianic prophecies of the Old testament. Wherever else I could find some excellent thoughts on our texts, I used them, believing that after all I was to bring you whatever help I could in developing the Old Testament portraits of Jesus.

To come back now to the outline in the Chain-Reference Bible. According to it, our discussion will take the following course: Portraits I. of the history of Christ, II. of the mission of Christ, III. of His titles, and IV. of His characteristics. (I may state here that this paper covers only the first of these parts.)

I.

Beginning with the history of Christ, we find three prophecies in Isaiah concerning it, namely in regard to His birth, to His family, and to His anointing.

Regarding the Savior’s birth Isaiah prophesies as follows, chap. 7, 14: “Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.” There can

be no doubt in the mind of any devout Christian, that these words refer to our Savior. When the angel appeared unto Joseph, announcing the birth of Jesus, he concluded his announcement with the words: "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us." Matt. 1, 22, 23.

The historical introduction of Isaiah to this remarkable prophecy is of such importance for its proper understanding, that we must take note of it at this point, even if only in its barest outline. (Read chap. 7, 1-9) The king of Damascus and the king of Israel had formed an alliance against the kingdom of Judah, and in the beginning of the reign of Ahaz, King of Judah, their combined forces invaded the land. Ahaz, an unbeliever and a wicked ruler, was filled with dread; instead of placing his trust in Jehovah, he hoped to save himself by an alliance with the Assyrians and resolved to dispatch an embassy with presents to Assyria. Such an alliance, however, was entirely against the will of God and threatened to bring a great disaster upon Judah. The prophet Isaiah, called for the purpose of admonishing both the king and the people to walk faithfully in the ways of the Lord and of safeguarding them against threatening punishment, was sent to King Ahaz, who at that time happened to be outside of the city, preparing to cut off the water supply for the approaching army. The object was to inspire the King with courage and to awaken in his heart faith and confidence in Jehovah.

This Isaiah hoped first to bring about by taking with him his son who bore the symbolical name Shear-jashub (lit. "a remnant shall return"). This name was symbolical of the destiny of the people and was to signify that the fear of the King regarding the total destruction of the state of Judah was unfounded. Thereupon he undertakes to make a deeper impression upon the King by a prophecy relating to the present danger. He predicts that the enemies will not succeed in subjugating the Kingdom of Judah, on the contrary, that one of the enemies, the Kingdom of Israel, was itself approaching the destruction which it had been preparing for others. After 65 years this nation would lose its national independence. Ahaz did not answer, but from his whole manner one can notice that the words of the prophet had made no impression upon him. In the name and upon the command of Jehovah, Isaiah now proposes to Ahaz, that he demand any miracle he might desire of God in order that the prophet's words might be confirmed by the fulfillment of this miracle. But, behold, the unbelieving Ahaz fears any such heavenly revelation. He has already decided upon the help he will choose, and very politely he declines the Lord's proposal: "I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord." v. 12. How very pious and meek this sounds; and yet it is an arrogant refusal of God's gracious proposal, and now a sign is forced upon him by God.

The coming of the Messiah was generally believed by the people; but the fear of approaching danger had made them forget the promises of God. They were looking forward to the total destruction of the state. To show that this fear on the part of the king and his people was unfounded, the prophet now predicts the following marvelous occurrence. As certain as it was, that the Messiah was to be born from a virgin among the people of his covenant, so certain also was it, that the people to whom this promise was given, and the family, from whom the Messiah was to descend, could not be totally destroyed. So much for the historical events preceding the prophecy.

Ahaz had declined the proffered sign, and Isaiah could no longer hope to awaken faith in the king's heart. Yet he felt it his duty to establish this fact that the deliverance when it came, was not a chance event, but a fulfillment of God's promises. It was furthermore his desire to strengthen the remnant of believers in their faith and hope. Therefore he gives them a sign, contrary to the will of Ahaz, by which every faithful member of God's nation might be strengthened in the belief, that according to his first prophecy, they would not be entirely eradicated as a people by the allied enemies. "I behold," he says, "the miraculous event of the future, the giving birth to a divine Savior by a virgin. How can ye look with assurance to his coming, and yet fear the destruction of the state?" The eyes of the divine seer are suddenly opened to the astounding miracle of all ages: "Behold, what do I see: the virgin over there is with child and brings forth a son and she calls his name Immanuel." The Hebrew noun for virgin is used with the definite article. Thereby the prophet wishes to indicate the particular individual who appears in the vision: "The virgin, or, the virgin over there." About the term "virgin" much has been written. Very naturally the enemies of everything miraculous in Scripture have from earliest days assailed

the Scriptural teaching concerning the Virgin Birth of Christ, which is for the first time clearly stated in this prophecy of Isaiah. The Hebrew term “Almah”, however, leaves very little room for dispute concerning its meaning. Modern exponents of Scripture have declared that it does not mean “virgin”, but “young woman”, that it can therefore refer also to a young married woman. This interpretation Christian commentators have easily refuted. They had the choice of several derivations for the term “almah”. The older commentaries derive it from the verb “alam” meaning to hide: A virgin was said to be “as one hidden from sight” in reference to the customs of the orient, where virgins are compelled to lead a secluded life. A better explanation is perhaps found in the derivation from an Arabian verb meaning “to grow up”, and a noun from this word, which can best be translated into English by the term “adolescence”. Whichever derivation one wishes to choose, it is evident in either case that the term “almah” used in the prophecy denotes a young, unmarried girl.

This, then, is the first part of the miracle predicted by Isaiah, that the long expected Messiah would be born of a virgin. The virgin birth of Jesus Christ is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. The church has made it a part of its confession when it says: “I believe in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord, who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary.” To doubt or deny this truth is to doubt or deny the cornerstone of Christian faith. This biological miracle is already clearly indicated in the very first prophecy recorded in Scripture, where God gives the promise to Adam and Eve that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head. So called “modern science” has very vehemently attacked this doctrine of Scripture. But on the other hand there are true men of science who have most valiantly defended it. I take great pleasure at this time to acquaint you with one of these Christian scientists, a Dr. Harry Rimmer of Los Angeles, Cal. He is, I believe, a minister in the Baptist church, but has for years given part of his time to an intensive study of science. For six months he serves as preacher in some church in the south, and during the rest of the year he does research work in various fields of science, such as paleontology (the study of fossil plants and animals), embryology, geology, biology and related subjects. Already he has become a noted lecturer and has written a great number of pamphlets in which he meets the false claims of modern science particularly on the subject of evolution, as well as their attacks on Scripture. I have read quite a number of these pamphlets and find them most refreshing reading, especially since the man stands foursquare on the doctrine that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. I am not ready to say whether he agrees with the teachings of our Lutheran Church in every respect. With this I mean that we may not be able to accept his interpretation of Scripture in every detail. But I do not hesitate to recommend his writings to everyone of you.

One of his dissertations bears the title: “A Scientist’s Viewpoint of the Virgin Birth.” There he speaks of our prophecy as the most assailed verse in the Old Testament, saying that “it has been discussed” and also “cussed” from every angle, he points out that the Jews of Jesus’ day understood this prophecy to mean exactly what we now know it means: that Christ was of supernatural origin, “for in John 7, 27, we read that the Jews were concerned in their own minds and hearts concerning Christ, and they asked one another, ‘Can this indeed be the Christ?’ But the objection was, ‘No, for when Christ comes no man will know from whence He is come, but we know this man’s father and mother.’” Having met some of the objections to the Virgin Birth of Christ in the first chapter, Dr. Rimmer then brings in the second chapter the evidence for the truth of our claim, first the heavenly witness, next the evidence of Joseph, the testimony of Mary, next that of the beloved physician, Saint Luke, and finally the testimony of Jesus himself: His closing words are: “If you do not believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, you have never studied the evidence, you are ignorant of what the Scripture says, or your heart is hardened by sin and you will not believe.... Search through the Word and see—that He was in very truth all that He testified to be, -- the virgin born Son of God and the Savior of sinning men!” So much for the first part of the prophecy, in which the miracle of the virgin birth of the Messiah is foretold.

We have still to consider the words: “and shall call his name Immanuel.” It has been argued by over-zealous defenders of the faith that the giving of the name by the mother hinted at the fact that the child had no human father. But weak argument is sometimes worse than no argument at all. It is reported that the mothers among the Hebrews quite frequently gave the name to their children. “and she shall call” is rather a general statement with no strong emphasis on the pronoun “she”, and the sentence means to say: “They (man!) shall call him, or he will be called.” We are very certain about the correctness of this interpretation; for in the Gospel

according to Matthew the angel repeats the prophecy in this form: "They shall". We do not understand this sentence to mean that the child would actually receive the name "immanuel" as a proper name. The prophets and among them especially Isaiah quite commonly attribute to some person or thing a name, which denotes or indicates a certain very prominent characteristic of that person. We need only call to mind that other prophecy in the 9. chapter in which the prophet enumerates a list of names, by which this same child was to be called, as Wonderful, Counselor, etc. Now Jesus was never called by any of these names but they do portray some outstanding qualities and attributes of our Savior. One of the most remarkable among these is the name "Immanuel", meaning "God-with-us". It contains a twofold promise to Israel. First, that this promised child would be as divine help personified among them when he came. In him would be fulfilled the hope and longing of the people as we find it so beautifully expressed in the Psalms: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Ps. 46, 1.5.7. No longer would they have to lift up their eyes to the invisible Jehovah for help; His help and refuge would be in their very midst. They might touch the hem of his garment and be healed; He would place upon their heads his gentle hand and banish the pains from their tortured bodies. Immanuel: Gods help with us.

But of course it means more. The name promises just what it says: "God himself will dwell among men when this child makes its blessed arrival on earth." Looking back upon this miracle of miracles, Saint Paul says very calmly but with unshakable certainty: "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Col. 2,9. This child is He of whom John the Evangelist speaks in exalted words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God., and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Jn. 1, 1.14. Let me also quote the venerable church father Chrysostom on this part of our prophecy: "For then is God with us the most, when He is seen upon earth and walks among men, and displays His great solicitude toward us." This, then, is the meaning of the words: "She shall call His name Immanuel": He will bear the name God-With-Us with good reason; for through Him and in Him God will be with us.

According to our prophecy, then, the people of the old covenant had quite a clear portrayal of the very miraculous entry which the Messiah would make at His birth, first that a virgin would give birth to Him, secondly that this wondrously begotten child would reveal in its human person the very Godhead itself. This Messianic interpretation of our prophecy was evidently acknowledged by the contemporaries of Isaiah. We find a parallel in Micha 5, 2. "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." Micha foretells here the birth of Him who is to be ruler of Israel, whose beginning is from eternity. Then he prophesies the impending sufferings of Israel, saying: "Therefore 'will he give them up,-until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth." The expression "she which travaileth" is clearly a reference to a definite already existing prophecy. I quote here from Rosenmueller: "She is not definitely called a virgin here; but it is evident that this is the meaning, for she is to bring forth a ruler of divine origin, one who is from everlasting, therefore not begotten by a mortal being. The two prophecies reciprocate each other; one supplies the other. Micha relates the divine origin of the Messiah, while Isaiah portrays the miracle of his birth."

B.

We turn now to the second of the three prophecies touching upon the history of Christ, which refers to His family. This is recorded in the first verse of the eleventh chapter and reads: "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." Let us again get the historical background for this prophecy. Isaiah had warned the kingdom of Israel, which was composed of the ten northern tribes, of the devastation and total destruction of their land. This prophecy had been fulfilled at the time of the present prophecy. The kingdom of Judah had likewise suffered greatly from the Assyrians, as Isaiah had foretold, because they had not sought help from God alone. Even greater tribulations were in store for the people of Judah. In view of these tragic circumstances the prophet now appears before the people with the present address which begins with verse five of the foregoing chapter. The object of his preaching is to uplift and to comfort

them, to encourage them to a renewed trust in their God. He points out to them that these visitations were bound to come upon them for their sins and apostasy, but that the Lord would under no conditions permit the entire ruin of his people, since He had ordained that the Messiah should appear in their midst and this had not as yet been fulfilled. The entire sermon is of a cheering nature. Threats were no longer in place because the whole nation was overcome with the fear of the invasion by the Assyrians. In his vision the prophet beholds a twofold deliverance, the first a deliverance from the king of Assyria, the second and greater by the promised Redeemer. The second deliverance is pictured in our chapter, of which I have read the first verse. The word “and” with which it begins shows us that it is closely attached to the prophecy of the foregoing chapter. There he had compared the Assyrians with a magnificent forest, v. 18.19, which shall be hewn down by the hand of Jehovah. Here, on the other hand, the house of David appears as a tree, which has been cut down, out of whose roots a small sprout should shoot up. Though unsightly and inconspicuous at first, this sprout was to grow into a splendid tree.

The Messianic character of this prophecy is so evident, that most of the Jewish interpreters have declared it to be a reference to Christ. The same may be said of a great number of later commentators. We shall not even trouble ourselves with the views of the objecting critics, for we have definite indications and assertions in the New Testament which assure us that this is truly a prophecy of the Messiah. There is a clear reference to our verse in Rev. 5,5: “And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and loose the seven seals thereof. Much more definitely does St. Paul express this fact in Rom. 15, 12: “And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.”

Perhaps we should mention one attack upon the Messianic content of our text which is quite a commonly accepted by liberal interpreters of Scripture. It is asserted that the root of Jesse referred to by Isaias is not a future but a contemporaneous individual, very likely King Hezekiah. But Isaiah presents this individual as a branch, at first weak and puny, which springs forth from the roots of a fallen tree. With this he indicates, or rather we should say, God declares, that the Davidic family would be abased and humiliated when the great and illustrious offspring should put into appearance. This does not apply to the house of David at Hezekiah’s time. Gesenius objects to this and says that sprigs or shoots also grow forth out of the roots of living trees and one need not in this case picture a tree that has been cut down. When we come to the interpretation of the prophecy we shall see such a root is indeed meant, for else the picture would not at all apply here. Besides, it is a remarkable fact that the individual referred to in the prophecy is spoken of as the offspring, not of David, but of his father Jesse, which is again an indication that the royal house would be reduced to the state of a private family at the coming of this remarkable being. At the time of Hezekiah, however, the house of David still retained its eminent position among the families of Judah. In speaking of the root sending up a new and vigorous branch, Isaiah evidently refers to a time when the Davidic dynasty would be not only greatly afflicted but actually ruined.

Entering now upon the interpretation of the prophecy, we find that the prophet, having predicted the fate of the Assyrians, compares with it the destiny of the house of David: the Assyrians will be humbled in the height of their glory; the Davidic dynasty will be exalted at the time of its deepest humiliation. “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse.” The symbol of a rod or branch for a descendant is a very common one. We find a similar statement in chap. 4,2: “And in that day shall the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious.” As we have already stated, critics object to the interpretation of “stem” as the stump of a fallen tree and have it mean a trunk in general. But this definition of the word conflicts with the etymology; for the Hebrew term used here is derived from a verb meaning “to cut down”. It likewise conflicts with the use of the word elsewhere. The term “stem” is found only in two other passages of Scripture. Let me read to you the words in Job 14, 7-8, as they show most clearly how little there is to the arguments of these liberal critics: “For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground.” There can be no misunderstanding concerning this passage, and I shall only add that both in the Talmud and in the Syriac dialect this word “stem” has the meaning “truncus”, stump of a tree.

It might be asked why the Messiah is here called the descendant of Jesse, whereas in other passages he is described as the offspring of David. Vitringa believes this is because Jesus was to be born at Bethlehem, which is the home of Jesse and not of David. The interpretation we touched upon before, however, seems more in keeping with the illustration of the prophecy, namely that the house of David had deteriorated to such an extent that the family was better mined after its lowly than after its illustrious ancestor. This is also Calvin's view, for he says. "He does not name David himself, but rather Jesse. For so much had the grandeur of this family been diminished, that it appeared rustic and ignoble, rather than royal."

"And a Branch shall grow out of his roots." The German translation is slightly different; it reads: "Und ein Zweig aus seiner Wurzel Frucht bringen." We shall not say that one translation is wrong and the other right rather that one very aptly supplements the other. Combining the two we get this interpretation: a branch growing forth from the roots of Jesse will grow up into a splendid fruit-bearing tree. A beautiful parallel of this prophecy we find in Ezekiel 17, 22-24: "Thus saith the Lord God; I will also take of the highest branch of the high cedar, and will set it; I will crop off from the top of his young twigs a tender one, and will plant it upon a high mountain and eminent: in the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it: and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar: and under it shall dwell all fowl of every wing; in the shadow of the branches thereof shall they dwell. And all the trees of the field shall know that I the Lord have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish: I the Lord have spoken and have done it." According to this second part of the prophecy, then, the Messiah will be lowly and of no renown, before he enters into his glorious state. Paraphrasing the whole prophecy, we would have this statement about our Lord: "Just as a tree-stump brings forth a young branch, which is at first unsightly, but soon develops into a splendid fruit-bearing tree, so also there will arise out of this family, lost and buried in loveliness and disgrace, a king, who, tho lowly and little esteemed at the first, will later acquire the greatest renown and glory."

The last prophecy of this group, presenting the history of the Messiah., is found in the verse immediately following, Is. 11,2: "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and, understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, and the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." While the first of our prophecies dealt with the subject of the Savior's birth, the second of His family, this calls to mind the eventful incident in His life which officially pointed Him out to the world as the Messiah or the Christ, both titles meaning as much as "The Anointed One." Endowed with a seer's vision, Isaiah beholds in the dim far future the figure of the Son of Man standing by the Jordan and the Spirit of God descending upon Him in order that He might be imbued with those heavenly gifts that made Him our Priest, Prophet and King. A Majestic statement it is with which our prophecy opens: "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him." Ruach Jehovah this divine being is called, not Ruach Elohim. Elohim is the general title of God, whereas Jehovah is the term used to denote the Covenant God, whose saving love employs every power in heaven to gather a people of His own, imbue them with the knowledge of his salvation and lead them to blessedness in this life and in the life hereafter. The Spirit of Jehovah, then, is no other than the Holy Spirit, whose gifts enable the recipient to carry on in the work of the Kingdom of God. "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him." In other words, he shall come upon the Messiah in a peculiar manner. The prophets were momentarily or at least only for a short time moved by the divine Spirit; but of Jesus it is here stated that the Spirit rested upon him. In him the power of the spirit was to be continuous and lasting. Saint John very clearly states this in his gospel, chap. 1, 32, 33: "And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost."

Continuing, Isaiah speaks of this spirit as the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, etc. These modifying nouns in the possessive case do not indicate possession, but effect. In other words, the spirit of Jehovah does not possess wisdom, understanding, counsel, and might, but bestows them upon this wondrous branch of the house of Jesse. It is not the intention of the prophet to enumerate all the perfections with which the spirit enriches the Messiah. Nor are these gifts logically distinguished. Of course there is a certain difference between the expressions, but not to such a degree, that one term excludes the other.

In fact, the first term, wisdom, actually covers all the others. Among the Hebrews, the word wisdom is both practical and theoretical. It is the knowledge of all that is good and desirable, and also a disposition to “perform deeds which are in accordance with this knowledge. Now while the first pair, wisdom and understanding, are requisites which the king must have as a human being, the second pair, counsel and might, are required by him for the successful prosecution of his reign. Counsel enables him to decide quickly and wisely in difficult situations; might enables him to carry out that which he has decided upon. The great King is to be efficient in counsel and deed. The last pair, knowledge and fear of the Lord, refer to religion, for religion is the true knowledge of God together with the state of heart which reflects this knowledge in thought, word, and deed.

These then, are the gifts divine which the promised Savior was to receive at his anointing. The question might quite naturally arise: why should our Savior, the Son of God, be in need of these gifts. Calvin very clearly answers this question by saying: “Although Christ did not in the least lack these gifts, yet because he took on our flesh, it was necessary for him to be enriched by them, in order that thereupon we might be made sharers of all blessings.”

This brings to a close the first series of prophecies in Isaiah concerning the birth, the family, and the anointing of our Lord. Viewing them as portraits of the coming Christ, of what spiritual benefit may they have been to a devout Jew in the days of Isaiah? Surely they must have refreshed the remnant of believers in their faith. For these prophecies are more vividly personal and more descriptive of the future Messiah than any we have studied. Moreover, they endow the person of the Messiah with astounding characteristics and with an outspoken halo of divine glory such as had never before been declared by the mouth of man. And finally there was that encouragement and consolation glowing from the picture which these poor souls, who were living during the period of their nation’s dissolution, so sorely needed. Let us take a last brief glance at the three prophecies. First, there was the clarion call: Behold, a virgin shall conceive. What a vivid portrayal of the Savior’s birth. The Messiah a virgin’s son. That is the new tidings, marvelous tidings, indeed. Here is a people which is slowly going down before the porter of the Assyrians. All their manpower, their armies and their weapons are of no avail against the conquerors. But here is the promise: a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel, God with us. Out of the despised and lonely house of Jesse there shall break forth a branch and grow into a mighty tree and bear fruits of inestimable worth.

God himself will prosper this virgin’s child. His spirit shall abide in him and endow him with all the spiritual gifts which now seemed to have departed from Israel forever; their Redeemer shall have wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of God. Far and above all, however, he shall be Immanuel, God in the flesh, the living, mighty, Savior-God dwelling among his people. It required a supreme, a divine effort to revive and fortify the faith of a people, whose homes and lands, whose liberty and worship; whose entire civilization and existence as a nation faced imminent ruin and destruction. But Jehovah, the God who had made an eternal covenant with those of his people who remained faithful to him, was equal to the occasion. Addressing them through the mouth of his prophet, he portrays to them in unmistakable terms the Messiah who shall appear in spite of anything that may happen to the nation and who shall come to them as the bearer of salvation.

There is a ring of immortality in these prophetic utterances. They have come down to us through the centuries with undiminished vigor. For us they involuntarily bring the sound of ringing Christmas chimes. This is not merely a sentimental notion on our part nor merely an emotional reaction. The content of the prophet’s message which we have studied today grips our inmost heart and appeals directly a people of God which is in search of divine guidance and support. Before bringing our discussion to a close, permit me to carry out this thought for just a moment.

The critical period through which we are passing resembles the days of Judah’s disintegration to such an extent that we as members of the church of God will do well to give to it some serious consideration. We need but to recall briefly the situation at Isaiah’s time. The people were in a state of moral decay because of the fact that they had given themselves over to a vicious form of idolatry for a period of many generations. They had come to a point where they had lost all confidence in themselves and the future of the state. Terrible fear and dread of approaching ruin clutched at their hearts. Their leader was a wicked and effeminate king who could not

possibly impress them with his leadership. Surely his proposal of an alliance with the powerful Assyrians was evidence enough of his own cowardice and lack of leadership and could only increase the panic which was already rife within the little nation. The most tragic feature in this entire situation, however, was the fact that this people in its moment of greatest need steadfastly refused together with its king the outstretched hand of Almighty God. In the history of these Jews there was countless evidence that their God had been powerful enough to save His people from supreme danger. Moabites, Ammonites, Philistines, and other nations great and small surrounding the chosen people of God were taught that it was a disastrous undertaking to fight against the Lord of Hosts. Vastly more powerful armies had at various times been turned to rout by the Israelite forces because the favor of Jehovah rested upon his people. Yet, when this same God approaches Judah through Isaiah the prophet and appeals to their king to entrust the future welfare of the state to Him instead of entrusting it to the Assyrians, he cannot find a hearing. When he offers to submit a sign of his willingness to save them from the approaching doom, their king rudely turns his back upon God's prophet and refuses to give ear to the prophet's message. And mind you, all this in the face of certain destruction. There is only one explanation for this tragic stubbornness. This people was so given over to sin, so estranged from its God by willful idolatry, so enmeshed by the wiles of Satan, that now its fate was irrevocably sealed. In spite of the fact that God himself mercifully entreated them to accept his never-failing aid and that this aid was theirs merely for the asking, it was nevertheless certain that no power in heaven or on earth would save this people from utter ruin.

My friends, this is a dreadful portrayal of soul bankruptcy. Examine, if you will, the entire gamut of disasters in the history of mankind, but you will find nothing to equal the calamity that has overtaken a people or individuals when they have willfully and consciously placed themselves beyond human and divine aid. Their life on earth is a life of despair, their life hereafter is darkness, and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

It is well at all times to heed with care the warning implied in the story of Judah's end, but particularly so in this present period of our nations history. Has not a divine sign come upon the nations of the earth from the hand of the Almighty? None asked for it; surely His own people, his children, did not desire it. But it is here, it has come, we can see it, we can feel it. Panic is stirring in the hearts of men everywhere, dread and fear of some calamity beyond all previous experience is marching through the lands. The world is in the grip of an unprecedented economic disaster. In vain has the world, has our nation looked for a leader who might show the way to a certain goal. The great parties of our nation through their representatives are talking night by night, but they are not saying anything. In spite of all the speeches we hear, the people of this nation look in vain for an indication that the depression is giving way to prosperity. It is a time when millions upon millions are crying for help, are fiercely crying for bread, for work; but the man has not appeared who knows of a remedy for this extreme misery. Here is a calamity that has engulfed the world like a vast flood and no man nor any group of men has stemmed it. One greater than man has sent it, sent it as a sign for the wise to heed, and only He can stem it if he will. Is not this a clear enough call that men should turn to Him and be saved? The mad whirl of this world has been suddenly brought to a halt. Men had accomplished marvelous things in this generation. Proudly they said there was no limit to their achievements. They were out to build a paradise on earth, making it a place of highest happiness, contentment, comfort and bliss. But they have been stopped in the midst of their strife. Vainly are they looking for the prosperity of the past. The sign has come and calls upon all men to repent and to return to their God, to bow before Him, acknowledging their wicked desires and their present need of His divine power. But, alas, it is to be feared that now, as then, the world as a whole is past repentance. People are set on having their pleasures and comforts and think they will yet win through, without God. We are not set up as prophets. It is not for us to tell the extent of Gods longsuffering nor the time which he has set for the end of all things.

But let us put our own house in order as becomes the children of God, lest we be weighed and found wanting in the day of His coming. Now more than ever before must the Christian be a salt of the earth and a light of the world. God may put off the terrors of the last days yet a while if His remnant, the people of His pasture, will penitently turn to Him for Mercy, help and guidance. Have not we also been tainted by the wickedness of the Sodom in which we live? Have not the Christians joined with the world to eat of forbidden fruit? Their desire for wealth has taken wings. They were willing to sacrifice much for comforts and pleasures,

but held back when offerings for the Lord were requested. In their mad race for life's happiness they have all but lost sight of the fact that the Son of God came, not to teach them how to love the world, but to set their eyes upon the life that is to come.

My dear colleagues, perhaps we have come to the point now where we must question ourselves. Parents have entrusted to us their most precious possession, the coming generation of Christian men and women of the Lutheran church. It is for us to train them along Christian principles, not only by the actual teaching we do in the classroom, but also to a great extent by our example, by the manner in which we act and carry on in their midst. This present critical condition leaves its mark upon the children as well as upon the adults of the nation. Fear, distrust, desperation, hopelessness and dark forebodings are in the very atmosphere the children breathe, the air is vibrant with it all. Now, then, how do they see us meet this crisis? Do we bear ourselves as Christian leaders at this time? All of us, I suppose have had a cut or two in our salaries. Some of us have suffered hardships perhaps because the decreased salary has been greatly-delayed. You have been forced to retrench in your household expenses and have dispensed with comforts formerly enjoyed. Are we bearing these troubles bravely and without fear? Or have we become fainthearted? Do we by our actions convey to the children a weakening of our faith and trust in the Lord our God? That cannot and must not be. We must be mindful as never before of the fact that God has entrusted to us a place of leadership among our people and with it a most sacred responsibility. Our hearts must be firm, our eyes must look confidently to the hills from whence cometh our help. Our life must be as an open book before our people and in its pages they must read the great truth expressed by our Savior when He says: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." Let us not seek fearfully for an alliance with people who may help us, as did the king of Judah. Our alliance is with the Lord of hosts, our Savior from everlasting to everlasting.

I said before that our three prophecies bring to mind the blessed Christmas tide. Prosperity is not around the corner, but Christmas is, and the message of the new-born Christ has brought more happiness into the lives of men than the prosperity of a thousand years ever could. In a few days you will begin your preparations in school for the Christmas program. This is your opportunity to put into practical use the thoughts we have just had under consideration. Let us not give our children the impression that we are preparing halfheartedly for Christmas. It is the happiest time in all the year for them, and should be that same thing for everyone of us no matter how old we may be. Let us make a definite effort to make this a joyous Christmas for ourselves and for everyone about us. Why should this be impossible? Thank God, we have more than a sign to hearten us, we have the glorious fulfillment of God's every promise before our very eyes in the pages of the Sacred Book. A virgin did conceive and bear a son, and from the realms of heaven itself angel hosts burst forth to proclaim to men that Immanuel had come, God-with-us. He gave himself to us, He is ours, a very present help in trouble, our refuge and strength. The root of Jesse has brought forth a branch, and lo, He is our Redeemer, the Savior of the world. Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge." This is a true Christian challenge pleasing to our God; let it sing in our hearts as we go back to our duties. No matter what tribulations may be in store for us, we shall endure them victoriously by the aid of our merciful God, who has given us His son, Immanuel. Amen.