

## Thoughts on the Readings of December 4, 2022

**The Common Thread** There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, a better king than David—a King of kings. And his roots will bear fruit, the true, spiritual fruit of faith. Those who have been made righteous by the King are able to have “all joy and peace in believing” ([Rom 15:13](#)). They flourish because God has redeemed their lives. Though all around them seems dark, they have learned to see matters as they truly are by seeing through the eyes of the Lord. Through the refining baptism of the Spirit, they are enabled to bear the fruit of faith. This fruit is not only good deeds and the love of neighbor but the fruit of fearing, loving, and trusting God. Belief is the best fruit in the kingdom’s orchard because it keeps the commandment to believe in the Son, the shoot of Jesse ([1 John 3:23](#)).

**First Reading - [Isaiah 11:1–10](#)** Isaiah mirrors the approach of David’s royal psalms, taking up the theme of God working through the king. Christians, too, take up the theme of the coming King of kings, especially in Advent. The royal language is important for us to take into account, because God does work through rulers. But it is also important for us to note that he now works through the Ruler of rulers. In him alone is there peace on earth.

**Psalms - [Psalm 72:1–7](#)** The psalmist indicates that this king is one who endures as long as the sun and the moon. He is the king of heaven and earth, as enduring as the heavens, but caring for the world, too. He not only gives rain — his righteousness also showers the earth with peace until the heavens pass away.

**Second Reading - [Romans 15:4–13](#)** What was written in former times was written so we might live according to the word of the Lord, of which the earlier writings foretold. His word has specific implications in our lives. We are to live so others see the goodness of God at work in us and come to know the peace of Christ. This is the goal of the God of Israel: that the Gentiles will also glorify his name. When the Root of Jesse comes, the promise to Abraham will be fulfilled and the Gentiles also will hope in the name of Christ.

**Gospel - [Matthew 3:1–12](#)** The initial substance of the Gospel message is that we need to repent. When one realizes that the kingdom of heaven is near, the

appropriate response is repentance. Religion as usual is a response incompatible with the announcement of the new kingdom. Nothing but truly following the new King is in order. Therefore, remorse is simply a beginning, as illustrated by the two baptisms in the lesson. John's baptism is for repentance in the human life; Jesus' baptism is for life in the Spirit of God. Baptism in Jesus burns away death so that the believer may live for the King.

### **Thoughts Concerning "Good Works"**

Being good will not bring peace to the restless heart, and that what does console is trust in God's promise of mercy through Jesus Christ. Some disagree, saying that works must be added to faith or God is not reconciled. Scripture says otherwise but consider that those who try the route of good deeds find that their hearts are still afraid. They wonder if God forgives all of their sins if they do not perform enough of the right kinds of acts. They are troubled, questioning if their salvation is guaranteed when they continue to sin, perhaps doing so by feeling proud of their deeds?

When one tries to reconcile God through good works, the conscience still trembles. One must put aside trust in self, and trust in Christ alone for righteousness before God. Nowhere in Scripture does it tell us to turn to ourselves and find peace. Nowhere are we instructed that by trying harder and doing better that we will then know peace and hope. Christ alone is the hope of all people, his reconciling sacrifice only being received by faith.