

Homily based on the readings from December 3, 2024 (Isaiah 11.1-10;  
Luke 10.21-24)

First of all, I just wanted introduce myself briefly, in case anyone here does not know me. My name is Deacon Christopher Hammond. I typically serve at the parishes in Groton and Ledyard, but I am delighted to be here today while the priests of the Diocese are all in Rhode Island for their annual convocation.

As most of us are probably aware, the Old Testament is replete with prophecies – *promises* that God has made to his chosen people about what will happen to them in the future. Even though these prophetic messages were written down and transmitted by human beings, it is essential that we recognize them as the word of God himself. As Saint Peter observed, “no prophecy ever came through human will; but rather human beings moved by the holy Spirit spoke under the influence of God” (2 Peter 1.21).

One aspect of any authentic prophecy is that it will certainly come to fulfillment. God is never wrong and he never misleads us. On the other hand, it is important to remember that prophecy is *rarely* fulfilled in the manner that its hearers would have expected. Although we can understand the basic outline of God's design, the depth and the complexities are utterly beyond our comprehension. In the words of the Prophet Isaiah:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.  
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts. (55.8-9)

Even when God tells us exactly what he is going to do, we cannot truly understand his plan for the universe until we have experienced it.

Today's first reading, also from the Prophet Isaiah, provides an excellent example of this phenomenon:

On that day,

A shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse,

and from his roots a bud shall blossom.

The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:

a Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,

A Spirit of counsel and of strength,

a Spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD,

and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.

From our perspective today – living more than 2700 years after these words were initially written down – we have a *reasonably* good idea as to what they mean. Through the sacred author, God is speaking about his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, who would be coming into the world to bridge the gap between the human and the divine.

Nevertheless, the Jewish people – to whom Christ was promised and from whom he was born – had a difficult time reconciling their interpretations of these prophecies with the *living, breathing, life-giving* incarnation of God that they actually encountered.

From our vantage point, here and now, it would be easy to point fingers at the people who did not recognize the promised Messiah – but we must bear in mind that any shred of understanding we possess is not the result of our own intellect or insight, but comes as a gift from God himself. As Jesus told his disciples in today’s Gospel:

Blessed are the eyes that see what you see.

For I say to you,

many prophets and kings desired to see what you see,

but did not see it,

and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.

As we continue our celebration of the Season of Advent, it is a good time to take stock of our blessings – not just that Christ came into the world, but that *we* have been given the *grace* and the *wisdom* to recognize him.