



**A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.**

*Isaiah 11:1*

### **A spotless rose**

Winter can be a beautiful season: the Christmas lights, the ice sculptures, the snowmen, the falling snow on a calm winter night. However, it seems that every winter gets a bit *colder*. Yes, the weather and wind-chill certainly contribute to coldness, but I'm not talking about that kind of *cold*. The *world* seems colder. Countries are at war with each other. Peaceful protestors are beaten and arrested. Families fall apart. High schools and movie theaters are tragically transformed into shooting galleries. It doesn't take much critical thinking to see that the cold bite of sin is everywhere.

However, this was the life we chose, wasn't it? God created a perfect world, flawless, full of happiness and prosperity, rich with the warmth of God's presence—and we sold it all for knowledge. Yet, despite our foolishness, God made us a promise in the Garden of Eden. Through enslavement, wandering in the desert, assault on every side, and even captivity, it was this saving promise that gave the people of Israel hope—even if the world was cold around them. Amidst the cruelties of the world, the imperfection and the corruption—the coldest winter—Isaiah spoke words of gospel comfort to those cold from sin. "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."

Imagine a snow-covered field, the bite of the frosty wind, the gray of winter sky. Now imagine a single rose, pushing through the ice and snow from the ground beneath, and blooming. The frigid temperature and the absence of light do not hinder its growth. In fact, this crimson rose "unfolds to light" in spite of it. Later, the prophet Isaiah would refer to this rose as a lamb being led "to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent." This tender shoot would bear the "iniquity of us all," and later be "assigned a grave with the wicked...though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth." For a short while, it seemed that the cold had triumphed, leaving the flower frozen and withered. But, as you and I know, the crimson pedals didn't stay sleeping.

This world is certainly a cold, cold place. Yet, amidst the cold around us, it is the same promise that Isaiah wrote about that assures us of the warmth and comfort of salvation, a promise that we know has come to fruition in the fruit of Jesse: Jesus Christ. Our Lord and King was born that Christmas night in a barn, in lowliness and humility. He, Immanuel, lived among us in our sinful plight, living the perfect life we could not, to die for our sins, the very people who put him on that cross. He conquered death so that we may have the assurance that we won't stay sleeping in death's cold either. And now, he has given us the opportunity to share this warm message with people living in a cold world. But not just here: everywhere! Let this message always take root in our hearts this holiday season and always.

**Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving us yet another opportunity to spread your word in song. Thank you for sending your son, Jesus, the means and message of our salvation. Thank you, Jesus, for coming to this world and taking on our likeness and dying for our sins on the cross. Let us never take such a gift of grace for granted but remind us daily of your love and our need to dwell in the warmth of your word. Amen.**