

Elisha and Christ

2 Kings 4:42-44
Psalm 145
Ephesians 4:1-6
John 6:1-15

Foreshadowing is a technique used by authors to give clues to readers about what might happen later in a story. The technique usually helps keep readers interested in the story's development. God, the Great Author of everything, foreshadowed His Son Jesus Christ frequently in the Old Testament, especially through the great prophets. For the next two weeks, our Scripture readings give us an opportunity to get to know two particular Old Testament men who foreshadowed Christ—Elisha and Moses.

This week we were introduced to the prophet Elisha.¹ While the prophet Elijah is more familiar to most people, Elisha also played a significant role in salvation history. There are three important aspects of his life that beautifully foreshadow Christ.

First, the ministry of Elisha and Jesus began at the Jordan River. In chapter two of the second book of Kings, we read about how Elisha succeeded Elijah. By the banks of the Jordan River, Elijah promised to give Elisha whatever he asked for and his response was, "May I receive a double portion of your spirit" (2 Kings 2:9b). As Elijah was taken up to heaven on a chariot of fire, Elisha received the gift for which he asked and thus began his ministry.

At Jesus' Baptism in the Jordan by John, who was prefigured by Elijah, the Holy Spirit came from heaven and rested on Jesus. As Christians, our new life, vocation, ministry, and service all spring forth from the waters of Baptism. It was at our Baptism that we first received the Holy Spirit and this Spirit sustains us on our Christian journey.

We find another similarity between Elisha and Christ by looking at their social habits. While the prophet Elijah was a bit of a recluse and loner, Elisha loved to hang around all sorts of people. Beginning in the last chapters of the first book of Kings and continuing through the beginning chapters of the second book of Kings, we read about Elisha's public life as he lived in towns, oversaw religious schools and rubbed elbows with the kings of Israel, Judah, Edom, and Syria. Jesus was also a very public figure. Unlike John the Baptist, Jesus was found teaching in public places, dwelling in villages, and dining with many different sorts of people, including sinners and public figures.

The example of Elisha and Jesus' public lives remind us that we are to be people "in the world, but not of the world." We are to be in the world, sharing the Good News of Jesus Christ with everyone we meet. Remember the prayer of Jesus to His Father about the Apostles before His death and Resurrection—

And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are. I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.

--John 17:11, 14-16, 18

¹ The name Elisha means "God his salvation"

Another similarity between Elisha and Christ are their miracles.² The similarity between the first reading today and the Gospel reading is just one example. Not only did both of them multiply food in order to feed a vast crowd, but they both cured lepers, and healed the blind. Saint Irenaeus points out another similar miracle in his work, Against the Heretics (V 17:3 [ANF 1:545]). He explains how the prophet Elisha was at a worksite of some fellow prophets who were constructing a tabernacle when he found out that the iron head of the axe had come loose and fallen into the Jordan River. The workers were not able to find it, but Elisha threw some wood into the water and the axe head floated to the top of the water and was retrieved. Irenaeus pointed out that just as Elisha used wood to recover that which was lost, the wood of Jesus Christ's cross recovered humanity, which had been lost through Adam's sin.

Imagine how proud the prophet Elisha must have felt when he found out, centuries after his death, that his life on earth had been a foreshadowed reflection of the coming Christ! You and I are now challenged to let Christ's life be a foreshadowing of our own lives!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Read 2 Kings 2:19-22. See how many stories from Jesus' life this Old Testament passage reminds you of.
- ✚ Read 2 Kings 4:1-7. What story from Jesus' life does this Old Testament passage remind you of? What are the similarities and what are the differences?

² It should be noted that the miracles Elisha performed were done through the power of God, whereas Jesus *is* God and performed His miracles through His own power and in union with the Father.