

Bible Tuesday for Advent IV, 2018

Micah 5:2-5

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
 who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
 from ancient days.

³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time
 when she who is in labor has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
 to the people of Israel.

⁴ And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,
 in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
 to the ends of the earth;

⁵ and he shall be the one of peace.

The prophecy of Micah was written in the late 8th and early 7th centuries BCE to those living in Jerusalem. This book is a contemporary of first Isaiah, written during the rise in power of Babylonia.

The prophecy foretells that God will raise up a new ruler for Israel out of King David's line. However, there will be a time of months, no more than a woman's pregnancy, during which Israel and Judah will be "given up" by God, that is, allowed to be attacked and ravaged by the Babylonians, because of Israel's unfaithfulness. It is difficult to interpret this 9 month or less time period. The Babylonian siege of Jerusalem which resulted in Jerusalem's fall and the beginning of the Babylonian Captivity, lasted anywhere from 18-30 months. The Babylonian Captivity lasted approximately 70 years.

After this time, the messiah will come and lead Israel as a king. God regularly refers to the kings of Israel and Judah as "my shepherds". Not only will this messiah be a good shepherd for Israel and Judah, but he will also be the peace maker for all the world.

Bethlehem – In Hebrew, beth (bait) is "house" and lehem (lechem) is "bread" so the name Bethlehem means house of bread or bakery. Bethlehem is King David's home town.

Psalm 80:1-7

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
 you who lead Joseph like a flock!

You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth

² before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.

Stir up your might,
and come to save us!
³ Restore us, O God;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.
⁴ O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?
⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears,
and given them tears to drink in full measure.
⁶ You make us the scorn^[a] of our neighbors;
our enemies laugh among themselves.
⁷ Restore us, O God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

The above Micah text speaks of the time when God will "give them up" to punishment for Israel's unfaithfulness. This psalm reads as Israel's pleading to God during that time. Joseph and Benjamin were Jacob's favorite sons, the only two by his favorite wife, Rachel. Ephraim and Manasseh are Jacob's two sons, whom Joseph adopted as his own that they might share equally in the covenant God made with all of Jacob's offspring.

The psalmist describes the woes of Israel, not in terms of starvation or homelessness, but in shame and derision. The psalmist pleads with God to put Israel back into its "My People" status, to "restore" them to their covenant position with God.

Hebrews 10:5-10

Consequently, when Christ^[a] came into the world, he said,
"Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,
but a body you have prepared for me;
⁶ in burnt offerings and sin offerings
you have taken no pleasure.
⁷ Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God'
(in the scroll of the book^[b] it is written of me)."
⁸ When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), ⁹ then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰ And it is by God's will^[c] that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

As I have stated in the past, the books of Hebrews is the fullest "systematic" work in the Bible. What I mean by that is that the author of Hebrews doesn't just quote the Hebrew scriptures and then tells how Jesus fulfills them. The author takes Old Testament scriptures and the gospel narratives of Jesus' life and extrapolates from them the how and why of faith in God. The above passage is an excellent example. Here the author quotes 1 Samuel 15, as well as Hosea and Psalms, which he blends into one quote. Then he takes other quotes from the Hebrews scriptures and makes of them a conversation between Jesus and God. I am not

suggesting that this is made up, but rather that the author artfully and faithfully uses Hebrew scriptures to convey exchanges between Jesus/God and Father/God. Then the author builds the Christian faith on that conversation. In this case, the author explains why baptized Christians, whether formerly Jewish or pagan, are no longer obliged to obey the Law of Moses but rather live in freedom in God. Certainly St. Paul teaches this, but his is not as developed a theology as the author of Hebrews presents a full generation after the death of Paul. Here, the author of Hebrews states that the sacrificial system, which was given as a method whereby Jews could worship God, thank God, and be at peace with God, was abused, broken, and no longer served the Jews. Therefore, Jesus says that he has not come to offer all those prescribed sacrifices perfectly, but rather to be God's sacrifice in human form and fulfill God's will. For this reason, the first order which is the Law of Moses and the sacrificial system, is set aside for the second order, which is absolute faith in and devotion to Jesus, the Christ.

Luke 1:39-55

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, ⁴⁰ where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. ⁴¹ When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit ⁴² and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. ⁴³ And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? ⁴⁴ For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. ⁴⁵ And blessed is she who believed that there would be ^[a] a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

⁶ And Mary ^[b] said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ His mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,

and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things,

and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

While all four gospels speak of the ministry of John the Baptist, only Luke tells us of his miraculous origin and of his parents. Luke is also the only gospel writer that relays the songs of Zechariah and Mary, both of which marvel at the topsy turvy nature of the Kingdom of God.

Here are two women cast aside by society but loved by God. Elizabeth, heretofore unable to have children, was shamed and castigated by her community because they believed barrenness was a punishment from God. Mary was a unwed teenager which was cause for stoning. Mary needs to get out of town because her pregnancy is about to show, and Elizabeth is an 80 year old woman about to have a baby and in desperate need of assistance. It is need, and God's blessing that brings these two distant cousins together.

In the Hebrew Scriptures and in the gospels prior to Easter, the Holy Spirit was said to be sent upon or to fill only certain individuals, and, at times, to be removed from individuals. Elizabeth is the first woman in all of scriptures to be described as "filled with the Holy Spirit." Both Elizabeth and John, in utero, rejoice at the arrival Mary and Jesus, in utero. Mary exclaims rhapsodically that God has paid attention to the forgotten ones, and that she will be remembered as a symbol of this wonder. Even in this amazing position, being the "theotokos" the bearer of God, Mary does not point to herself, but humbling points to God, and eagerly awaits the fulfillment of God's covenant with all.