

Fourth Sunday in Advent – December 20, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Micah 5:2-5

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." 3) Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. 4) He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. 5) And he will be their peace.

Dear Friends in Christ:

Normally one receives a birth announcement after a child has been born – so that you can share information about the child. But when it comes to the birth of our Savior the Lord did things differently. He sent out his announcements ahead of time so that it would be possible for all men to identify their Savior. We call them prophecies and with each one more and more details about our Savior and his birth. Our text is one of these many prophecies which speak of the birth of our King. May this birth announcement bring you joy as we talk about

Our Newborn King *who is*

1. A ruler – from ancient times
2. A human – born to a human mother
3. A shepherd – courageous, strong, and majestic for all people
4. A conqueror – whose empire is eternal

In the context of Micah's prophecy the words of our text follow the stunning announcements that God's people would marshal their troops in vain because their ruler would be humiliated by the Babylonians. It would seem that the stage has been set for Micah to describe the destruction of Jerusalem – but instead Isaiah addresses the little village of Bethlehem whose claim to fame at this time was that David – the warrior king of Israel was born there. But those glory days of Bethlehem and the nation of Israel were long gone displaced by faithless people and heathen rulers.

At that time Bethlehem would be honored to be home of a king once again – a king even greater than David. **"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."**

While it may seem amazing that another ruler for Israel would come from Bethlehem the truly amazing part of this birth announcement are the details about that king – his origins are from of old, from ancient times. Micah speaks of our King as having eternal origins – before David was he already was. It is true that the Savior King would be able to trace his lineage through the family of David, back to Abraham and ultimately to Adam. He would be the fulfillment of God's ancient plan to send the perfect ruler. This ruler however existed even before Adam and Eve were created in the Garden of Eden. As soon as Adam and Eve fell into sin – God promised them a Savior from sin. This is the Savior King Micah says is from of Old – from eternity.

One of Micah's contemporaries – the prophet Isaiah – also shared a birth announcement in which he called this Savior King by the name Immanuel – which means God with us. Now it makes sense to us why Micah says his

origins are from eternity. This King is true God. Indeed Isaiah makes that clear when he says: (Isaiah 9:6) **For to us a child is born, to us a son is given...And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

Now too, we understand Jesus' words: **Before Abram was born, I am.** (John 8:58) Our Savior is the eternal son of God but he is also a human – born to a human mother; the child of a virgin as told us by Isaiah – the virgin Mary as reported by the Gospel writer Luke. Micah spoke of his birth this way: **3) Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.** In our Epistle lesson this Savior proclaims – **A body you have prepared for me.** Truly Jesus is the seed of the woman come to destroy the works of the Devil. True man and true God – that's Immanuel God with us.

He's one of us born to bring us salvation. To bring us salvation it was necessary for our Savior King to humble himself becoming one of us by allowing himself to be born of the Virgin Mary. As a part of his humiliation he emptied himself of his heavenly powers so that he could suffer and die for all men.

This king will not only rule over the Israelites as David did – but as the Scriptures tell us all nations will be a part of his kingdom. When Israel has no king of her own and after the mother of the King from Bethlehem gives birth – the rest of his brothers (his fellow human beings) will be added to his kingdom. Micah had mentioned them earlier when he wrote (Micah 4:2) **Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths."**

Once again Isaiah the prophet elaborates on the role of the Lord's chosen servant as the Savior of all as he quotes that servant: (Isaiah 49:5-6) **And now the LORD says-- he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am honored in the eyes of the LORD and my God has been my strength-- 6) he says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."**

In bringing the nations to salvation Jesus made them holy. He now regards us as his brothers as the writer to the Hebrews tells us. (Hebrews 2:11) **Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.** How wonderful it is that we are accepted by this ruler as his brothers. That makes us heirs together with him of eternal life.

Jesus spoke of his Gentile brothers as the other sheep whom he would shepherd.

Our text also announces that our new born king will be a shepherd – courageous, strong and majestic for all people. **He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.**

Our King is not only loving but strong. He will stand in the strength of the Lord. He brings the strength of almighty God to the task of watching over and caring for his sheep. Here is the shepherd who satisfies his sheep with everything they need and quarters his sheep in green pastures with quiet waters. Here is the shepherd who is good, who lays down his life for the sheep, who has the power not only to lay down his life but to take it up again. Here is the shepherd who gives his sheep eternal life and guarantees that no one can snatch them out of his hands.

Here is the shepherd who is exalted in heavenly glory and who provides eternal security for his sheep. Just as King David from Bethlehem was a mighty conqueror so the Newborn King announced in our text will be a

mighty conqueror – defeating sin, death and the devil – providing peace for his lambs in an eternal kingdom. Micah assures us our newborn King will be our peace.

We hear lots about peace at Christmas time – but what do these words mean? A complete answer to that question would take more words than we have time to hear and yet even then we would not have exhausted their full meaning. Nor will we ever experience their full joy in this lifetime – this peace will endure through all eternity.

Through our peace giver we have a relationship of complete unity, perfect harmony and peace with our heavenly Father. The Savior's atoning death made peace between God and us guilty sinners. He daily intercedes with the Father providing us peace of conscience. His shepherd's love and guardian care allow us to live in peace in this vale of tears. His death and resurrection provide peace in the hour of our death. It's no wonder Isaiah called him the prince of peace.

And that's why the angels announced his birth to the shepherds singing: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests. Today we've had the privilege of hearing Micah announce the birth of our newborn king. We looked at OT prophecies and quotes from Jesus himself which assures us that our newborn king is come.

Later this week our children will share God's Christmas gift with those who gather for worship on Christmas Eve.

When a person receives a birth announcement – they often can't wait to see the new arrival for themselves. The OT faithful waited hundreds of years for this announcement to become a reality. 2000 years ago that promise came to fulfillment. Won't you join us this Christmas Eve and Christmas day as we give thanks to our Lord for his wonderful gift. Amen.