

Fourth Sunday in Advent

December 18, 2022

Micah 5:2-5a:

“Out of the Mess”

- I. The Ruler.
- II. The Time.
- III. The Shepherd.
- IV. A Forever Peace.

Pilgrim Lutheran Church
2155 N. Oakland Avenue
Decatur Illinois 62526

Micah 5:2-5a

Dear Friends in Christ,

Micah was a prophet over 700 years before Jesus walked the earth. He lived to see the fall of the ten northern Tribes of Israel in 722 B.C. by the hands of the Assyrians. Though he wouldn't see it, he would prophecy the fall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah, which included the Tribe of Benjamin, in 586 B.C. by the hands of the Babylonians. The falls were the result of the incredible spiritual, moral, and political corruption of God's people; His visible church on earth.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the Russian Novelist, was described as "an outspoken critic of communism and helped to raise global awareness of political repression in the Soviet Union." He died in 2008. He once said: "If I were asked today to formulate...the main cause of the ruinous [Russian] revolution that swallowed up some sixty million of our people, I could not put it more accurately than to repeat: 'Men have forgotten God.'" (Albert M. Wells, Jr., Inspiring Quotations, Thomas Nelson publishers, Nashville, 1988, p. 139)

So, what's new? It has always been that way. Have you ever said, "What a mess!" - or "How did we get into this mess?" - or "How do we get out of this mess?" It's the story of this world from the beginning to the present: thousands of years of one mess after another. This last Sunday of Advent we are to understand that Jesus will bring us . . .

OUT OF THE MESS

I. The Ruler.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is of old, from ancient days. (v.2)

First, there's the obvious. From the seemingly insignificant clan of Ephratha in Bethlehem, a town too small to be listed among the cities belonging to the clans of Judah, God says "shall come forth for me one who is to be the ruler in Israel." This is the Messiah - The Christ - The King of kings - The Ruler.

It is worthy to note that Rachel, the wife of the Old Testament Patriarch Jacob who was the Grandson of Abraham, was buried in Bethlehem. Ruth, a Moabite, married Boaz, a Bethlehemite and descendent of Jacob. Ruth and Boaz were the Great Grandparents of King David who was born in Bethlehem. St. Matthew's Gospel begins with, "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." (St. Mt. 1:1) His "coming forth from old, from ancient of days" is clarified by Luther:

(Jesus) does not come forth first from Bethlehem after the Babylonian captivity but came forth a long time ago already. This is just the way John describes the divinity of Christ (John 1:1): "In the beginning was the word." In...Ps. 90:2, Moses sings: "From everlasting to everlasting Thou art God." There Moses used the same expression that Micah uses here, that is: "You did not begin with the world, but, when the world began to be, You already were." Christ also says about Himself: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58) (AE 18:248).

Astounding, isn't it? God defies human reasoning in every way. The Creator and Ruler of all things would enter this world through the womb of Mary, would be born in a no-where town, and walk this earth.

The Word of God always stops human reasoning cold: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher above the earth (infinitely higher), so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Is.55:8,9)

As much as human reason likes to think it has the answers, it doesn't. As some of you will recall, God had Moses say, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever..." (Deut.29:29). "The things revealed" ultimately point to the "ruler of Israel," the Christ Who comes to redeem His people; to buy them from sin, death, and hell. Our text then states . . .

II. The Time.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.
(v.3)

"He shall give them up" starts with the end of Israel as an earthly kingdom and would move to "she who is in labor has given birth." This refers to Mary and the birth of Jesus. A time was set, as Scriptures say, "But when the fulness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman..." (Gal. 4:4) God sets the time.

The third verse of our text then states that after Christ's birth "then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel." "The rest of his brothers shall return" encompasses the New Testament era, the New Testament church. It's what the Lord had Paul write: "Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery...a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles has come in. And in this way all Israel will be saved..." (Rm.11:25,26a) All Israel is not an earthly Israel, but the church, Jew and Gentile. As Paul also writes to the Gentiles, "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God." (Eph. 2:19) Then we're told . . .

III. The Shepherd.

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

No doubt the words "he shall stand and shepherd his flock" instantly take us to the words of the Twenty-Third Psalm, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.", and the words "He makes me...He leads me...He restores my soul." And, no doubt, the words of Jesus, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I am the good Shepherd. I know my own and my own know me..." (Jn. 10:11) He is The Shepherd.

But, maybe, the question for some is, how does the flock dwell secure? Just look at the mess we're in, the turbulence of this world! Look at the uncertainties! How are we to understand this in light of the sufferings the church has endured and continues to face? Well, that brings us to the final words of our text . . .

IV. A Forever Peace.

"And he shall be their peace." (v.5a) Those words move to Jesus' words to the first disciples and, consequently, to the disciples here: "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart, I have overcome the world." (Jn.17:33)

In the first place, the peace He is calls us to understand what most of you understand: we are sinful, we struggle with sin, we are not worthy of God's love. It calls us to understand that, as Scriptures say, we "were by nature children of wrath (Eph. 2:3b)"; to understand that, as Scriptures say, "while we were weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly (Rm. 5:6)"; to understand that, as Scriptures say, "while we were sinners, Christ died for us (Rm.5:8)"; to understand that, as Scriptures say, "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son (Rm.5:10)." The Ruler of Heaven and

Earth entered this world for us, so that we could dwell secure in this world with the knowledge of His forgiveness, mercy, love and the promise of eternal life. Jesus is our peace. This world is not and will never be.

If we know the Scriptures and believe them, then we have no excuse, never, for wondering why the world is the way it is. Everything that has been and is unfolding is what the Lord Jesus said would happen as we move to the day of His return. If we know Scriptures, Jesus says of this world's closing moments, "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be." (Mt. 24:21)

In the second place, the peace He is will take us to this incomprehensible promise given to John for us: "Beloved we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we will see him as he is." (1 Jn.3:20) We cannot truly fathom "we shall be like him."

Finally, the peace He is lifts us to the words of John:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Rev. 21:3,4)

In Christ Jesus we are being prepared to move out of the mess of a fallen world. **Out Of The Mess...forever...into everlasting peace and joy! Amen.**

Pastor Bill Abbott