

Song of Micah
Micah 5:2-4

Our text for meditation is the Old Testament lesson read earlier as recorded by the prophet Micah.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, the Babe of Bethlehem, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Did you hear the text from Micah today? “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.”

This was written about 720 years before the birth which we celebrate this morning. Micah describes the fact that Bethlehem will be the birthplace of the One who is from everlasting – the eternal God would take on human flesh and be born in the small town of Bethlehem.

You know what? The world has never been the same since. Take today for example. Here it is a Friday and most places are closed – to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Even people who do not believe in God will give gifts to others today, most not even realizing that in giving gifts, they are emulating the gift God gave of a Savior. It is a day of goodwill toward others. That is truly amazing!

As I travel to do visits, I spend a lot of time listening to the radio. One of the many commercials I hear is one that speaks about volunteering, that the spirit of volunteering makes many feel good. It is true. But can you imagine what it would be if people understood the true depth of the gift God gave? How that Child wrapped in swaddling clothes is King of all creation? And that Child was born and volunteered to give His life as a ransom to free us all from the hatred, anger, fear, and death that seems to rule in this world and life?

If only we could all volunteer to sacrifice ourselves for those who hate us, despise us, shame us, belittle us, and want our harm!

The song, O, Little Town of Bethlehem, was written in 1867 by Reverend Philip Brooks of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This was almost two years after the end of the Civil War. During that conflict, approximately 620,000 soldiers died from combat, accident, starvation, and disease during the Civil War. There was a hunger in this nation for peace, healing, and forgiveness. That hunger was answered in the words of Micah fulfilled on Christmas.

You can hear that hunger – and the satisfying of that hunger – in the words of this hymn.

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God the King, and peace to men on earth!

How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n;
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n.

No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

Micah, inspired by the Holy Spirit wrote the words of our Old Testament lesson, and it speaks of a peace that Paul will later proclaim “passes all understanding.” It is a peace that comes only from God. It is a peace that flows from the forgiveness that Child purchased, and now delivers to us in Word and Sacrament.

Yet it happened so humbly in the beginning. The Word of God which spoke all things into existence at the beginning was born not with trumpet fanfare, a royal pronouncement, and the command for all to kneel before Him, but came forth from a lowly maiden named Mary who wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger.

There was nothing about this child that set Him apart from other children. Isaiah says of Him, *he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.* (Isaiah 53:2 ESV)

Humble were His earthly origins at birth. But some thirty years later, He did manage to draw the ire and attention of the leaders of the temple, so they had Him arrested and brought trumped up charges against Him to the Roman curate, Pilate. Finally He was crucified, given the most despicable death of the most vile of criminals.

It is the cross which Christ takes up as His scepter to begin His rule. In His death He defeats sin and death. In His resurrection He sets the captives free.

Can you see these great things in the Babe of Bethlehem? Do you see your Ruler in the manger? Is your King visible in swaddling clothes? No, He is not!

It was by faith that Mary and Joseph saw not just another child, but their Savior and King, the Ruler over Israel. By the Word of God, the Spirit worked faith and gave them eyes to see, eyes which looked beyond the obvious outward appearance. Faith to believe what Micah foretold He would be. Faith to believe that Jesus is **your** God, born in such humble circumstances, is the greatest miracle connected with the birth of Jesus.

It is by that faith you have gathered this day. It is the Spirit which is at work in you through the Word of God, giving you eyes of faith to see beyond what simple flesh would apprehend.

Your ruler comes, to feed you - take eat, this is my body.
Your ruler comes, to quench your thirst - take drink, this is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.
Your ruler comes, to tell you good news - as I live and reign forever, so you too shall live, with me, forever.

Today, the miracle of Christmas takes place again, for it is by faith that you see Jesus as more than a cute little baby, but as your Savior God. Yes, how silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv'n; So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His Heav'n.

No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, Where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel! Amen.