

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come. Amen.

² “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.
This is God’s Word for God’s People.

Dear Children of Peace,

As we begin this New Year, everyone is hoping that it will be much better than 2020. Different sources have been speculating on how things will be different – politically, economically, and especially on the health front. Yet, no one really knows what the new year will bring. There are no guarantees and so we will just have to wait and see what the year 2021 will bring us in so many different areas.

A lot of people felt that way about the promised Messiah 2000 years ago. The people just didn’t know exactly what to expect. Our Gospel lesson reminds us of how the people knew what God had promised, but they were questioning whether Jesus was really the promised Messiah. God, however, was providing details and preparing his people for the promised Messiah long before the Christ child was born in Bethlehem.

Today we want to consider just a few of those details the Old Testament prophet Micah told the people about, **“Jesus, Our Newborn King.”** Micah is going to point out for us that he is, **“A Ruler,” “A Human,” “A Shepherd,”** and **“A Peacemaker.”**

I. The words of Micah are usually recited during the Children’s Christmas Service every year. The connection we make with these words are that the Christ child will be born in Bethlehem, but that is only a part of this prophecy.

Micah also includes, **“Out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”** From this ordinary – insignificant town – a very significant ruler is going to come. He is going to be a ruler over Israel. But Jesus would be no ordinary ruler. When Micah tells us his origins are from of old he really is saying that this special ruler is eternal – as John put it in his Gospel, he was there in the beginning.

We know that this special ruler wasn’t born in a fancy house and a royal city like Jerusalem. He was royalty – of the house and line of King David – born in the humble surroundings of a manger and yet his birth announcement to the shepherds was as glorious as any kingly birth announcement. But even though he will be ruler over Israel, he did not come to reign as an earthly king – what many of the people were looking for – but rather as a spiritual king. Not wearing a crown of gold and jewels but rather a crown of thorns as he fought the greatest spiritual battle ever against our enemy, Satan and defeated him for us.

What a lesson in humility for us, who place so much emphasis on outward appearances. What a lesson for us who always want to be treated “right” from a Savior who did not worry about outward appearances. Instead, Jesus shows his greatness by being more humble than we can possibly imagine. Not only did he have a humble birthplace, but God lowered himself to become a person, or, as we say in the Nicene Creed, “fully human,” for us.

II. “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.” We know that Mary gave birth to Jesus at just the right time – a time of God’s choosing. But Verse 3 also is a prophecy about the New Testament church. It says that Jesus became a human being so that Israelites and Gentiles alike could call Jesus their brother.

I know that brothers and sisters don’t always get along. But what if you had Jesus as your brother as you grew up? Oh, he’d be the perfect brother! He’d never get jealous of the things that you had. Jesus would never grab his toys away from you and say, “no! Mine!” Jesus would encourage your parents to place you ahead of him.

Well, Jesus is your brother. He didn’t grow up in your household like you and your siblings, but he came to the very same earth, had the very same joys, experienced the very same sorrows, all so that he could die for you. You see, God can’t die. So God couldn’t die on the cross for your sins. But people can die. So a person, the God-Man Jesus, died for your sins so that you would be his sister or brother for all eternity.

The lesson from Hebrews which was read earlier explains it this way, **“He too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death— that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death... ¹⁷ For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way... that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.”** (Hebrews 2:14-18). Jesus knows the temptations we face because he himself was tempted in the same we are but with one difference – he did not give into those temptations. But because he knows what temptation is like he helps us who are being tempted. But there is more: Micah describes Jesus, the one who helps and guides us, as our Shepherd.

III. “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.” Jesus watches over us with the strength of the Lord Almighty because he is God. He has the power to protect us and to provide for our needs but the tool he uses most to guard and guide us is His Word. The 23rd Psalm points out that his Word is his rod and his staff – the two main tools of a shepherd – and he brings us his word for our benefit. In our Good Shepherd we also see the majesty of his name, **“For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.”** (Acts 4:12).

Jesus is our Good Shepherd who has laid down his life for us and it is only through trust and faith in him that we have the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. There is no other way. We are thankful for that because our spiritual life depends on him and not on us. He will keep us on the path of righteousness and guide us through life – providing for our needs. All he asks is that

we listen to his voice and follow him. He speaks to us through his Word and his Word brings us peace and comfort because he is our Peacemaker.

IV. Micah writes, **“And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he will be their peace.”** Peace and security is something we all want. The government tries to provide these things and does the best it can, but in recent times, peace and security have been missing, especially in some areas of our country. In human terms, it is impossible to have perfect security and perfect peace. People make mistakes and people are guided by their sinful desires that get in the way of peace and security. Then we have to also worry about Satan stirring the pot and the world can quickly become quite chaotic.

That’s why it’s so great that our Newborn King brings us the blessings of peace and security. We have **“Peace of heart and conscience”** knowing that our sins are forgiven and Satan’s accusations against us are empty.

We have **“Peace of mind in this world of turmoil”** knowing the Lord will take care of us as a shepherd provides for his sheep and even if we have challenges that come into our lives, he promises to guide us through them and to work them out for our good.

We have **“Peace in the Hour of Death.”** because His death and resurrection removes the sting of death forever. We know that through faith in our newborn King, we will live forever with him in heaven. Death is only a doorway to heaven for the Christian and therefore is nothing we have to fear.

Life is full of uncertainty but when it comes to our Savior, there is no uncertainty. Our God tells us so much about our Savior. Today, through the words of the prophet Micah, we want to remember that our newborn King is “Our Ruler,” who became “Human just like us,” Who continues as “Our Shepherd – guiding us and caring for us” and finally, who brings us “A Peace that the world cannot give us.” May Micah’s words help us to see how great our Savior is and how greatly he continues to love us and bless us. Amen.