

Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Second Sunday after Christmas

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the forth Chapter of Micah.²

“But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

“And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it. For all people will walk every one in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

“...

“... But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah³ [**BETH-lee-hem EPP-rath-uh**], though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel.

“And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the twenty-first Verse of the second Chapter of the Gospel According to St. Luke.⁴

“... And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtle-doves, or two young pigeons. And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson:

“But you, O Bethlehem Eph'rathah [**BETH-lee-hem
EPP-rath-uh**],
who are little to be among the clans of Judah,

from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose origin is from old,
from ancient days.”⁵

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of
the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Homily:

Micah was a younger contemporary of Isaiah’s, so he worked and wrote under the same circumstances. That is, in the late Eighth and early Seventh Centuries before Christ, the “northern Kingdom” of Israel had fallen to Syria and then Assyria, while the “southern Kingdom” of Judah had been reduced to a weak vassal state under the sway of Assyria.

Micah prophesied the ultimate fall of Jerusalem, which occurred when the Babylonians first plundered the city in 598 B.C. and then destroyed it in 587 B.C. Micah, however, wrote from a very different perspective than did Isaiah. Isaiah was of noble descent; Micah was a man of the common people. Isaiah was a citizen of the capital city; Micah dwelt in a small village in the Judean foothills. Thus it is only natural that Micah should be the one who has given us the prophecy concerning God’s plan for another small Judean village, Bethlehem.

“Bethlehem” comes from the Hebrew “beth lechem” [**BETH LEKH-em**], or “house of bread”. That is an entirely suitable name for the birthplace of the One Who brought to us the Bread of Life.⁶

In the Gospels, this prophecy of Micah’s is taken to apply directly to the birth of Our Lord. It was the reason that, after Herod learned from the Wise Men of the birth of Christ, he sought the Christ Child in the district of Bethlehem.⁷ In fact, the people of Our Lord’s day were well aware

of this prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and expected that the Anointed One would hail from thence.⁸

Micah's prophecy of the birth of Our Lord also contains another element which is often overlooked: "one ... whose origin is from old, from ancient days". We, as Christians, understand this to mean that the One whose birth was foretold was, and is, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Who, as the Creed tells us, was "Begotten of his Father before all worlds, ... By whom all things were made".⁹

That is, the Messiah, who is God the Son, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, was not only born in the village of Bethlehem but was begotten by God the Father before all creation and actually participated in that creation.

Conclusion:

Thus we have the most important Person ever born being born in one of the most insignificant villages that has ever existed. Just as the sophisticated, urbane residents of Jerusalem should have been more careful than to sneer at a minor, rural place, so we should be careful never to look down on any person or any part of God's creation.

All have their place in His plan and some have places so immense that we, with our limited human vision and understanding, cannot conceive of what He intends for them.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister¹⁰
January 3, 2009.

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Christian Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xii (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

² Micah 4: 1-5, 5:2-4 (KJV).

³ Another name for Bethlehem or the area immediately surrounding it. PAUL J. ACHEMEIER, HARPER'S BIBLE DICTIONARY (HarperSanFrancisco 1985), s.v. "Ephrathah".

⁴ St. Luke 2:21-32 (KJV).

⁵ Micah 5: 2 (RSV).

⁶ Cf. St. John 6: 32-35.

⁷ St. Matthew 2: 5-6.

⁸ St. John 7: 40-43.

⁹ *The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 71 (PECUSA 1928, rev. 1943).

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