

# "Jesus, Shepherd at Bethlehem"

## Micah 5:2-4

25 December Anno Domini 2001

Festival of the Nativity of our Lord -- Christmas Day

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Emmett, Idaho

Pastor Michael L. McCoy

Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

Dear Baptized,

Good ... mornin' ... Bethlehem! It's time to rise and shine. The darkness of the night has passed and the Son is come to brighten your day. What's the matter, Bethlehem? You look sleepy this morning. Are you tired from such a long night of festivities at the inn where it is reported that there was not a single room left? Has Caesar Augustus' decree brought many sons of David to town? - the return of many brethren? Did the coming and going of shepherds during the night keep you awake? Yo, Bethlehem. Do you not know what has just taken place within your borders in the last 24 hours? Do you not know that your number has increased by that ancient number, one? Did you miss it? Or rather, did you miss Him, oh little town of Bethlehem?

Hmm. It is a strange business - this talking to a town, this voicing of words to a village. People will wonder if you continue speaking to a city. That is, however, exactly what the LORD God does through the prophet Micah. His Word of hope is borne by the LORD's prophet to God's people. Listen! The Word goes forth in a land of history ... a plot in which Rachel was buried and fields where Ruth gleaned - a place where David was born and later, the Philistines had a garrison - a region that reels from the campaigns of Alexander the Great and the desolations of Antiochus Epiphanes - a land sorely oppressed by the strong arm of the Caesar of Rome and foully degraded by paranoid king, Herod of Jerusalem.

O Bethlehem, under the theme of "Jesus, Shepherd of Bethlehem," listen to the sermon text, Micah 5:2-6, for therein the LORD God is speaking to Bethlehem:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
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 of old,  
from ancient days.  
Therefore He shall give them up until the time  
when she who is in travail has brought forth;  
then the rest of His brethren shall return  
to the people of Israel.  
And He shall stand and feed 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.

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Behold the promise given to you, oh little town of Bethlehem of Ephrathah, is fulfilled in you this day. The Christ is born. The Lion of Judah is come to be "Ruler in Israel" and this Man of Peace, "Whose origin is from of old" reclines in an animal's feeding trough. Behold, during the night now ended, a virgin named Mary has given Birth, for "she who is in travail has brought forth" "her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). This Ancient One, at Whose Word time was called forth out of eternity, at Whose Word the universe was created out of nothing and, indeed, Whose days are without beginning and without end, is a one-day old newborn cradled in the arms of His mother.

Why? Because the sons of men and the children of God are scattered across the face of the earth because of their Sin, their transgressions and the lawlessness of others. False doctrines, sown as the seed from Satan and germinating in the heart of man, have led many astray and separated them from the LORD. False practices, fed by the imagination of man and driven by the desires for dead idols, have caused many to forsake the Living God and abide outside the sanctuary of the same. Assyria stormed across the face of the earth and Babylon force-marched many into captivity in an alien land. The Medes and Persians rise and fall. Alexander the Great led the Greek armies in a juggernaut that overwhelmed nation after nation. The Roman legions established peace by the sword. And what shall be said about the rest? -for time would fail me to speak of the Ptolemies and the Seleucids, Antiochus Epiphanes and Herod.

Therefore the LORD God gave "them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth" and "in the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son, born of woman, born under the Law" (Galatians 4). So Immanuel is come ... God is with us, this "One Who is to be Ruler in Israel, Whose origin is from of old, from ancient days."

But notice something. He does not come to you, O Bethlehem Ephratha, to sit as a Judge with the scepter between His feet and announce the verdict of His perfect, holy, righteous, sin-condemning Law. "His brethren shall return" but their motivation for doing so will not be the bench. It will be the beam. For when Jesus is lifted up, He will draw all men to Himself. When Christ is crucified, the sins of all and all your sins were brought unto and onto and into Christ. Though you deserved to die in, with and under your sins and receive the just judgment and eternal consequence for your Sin, this was diverted from you and charged to the Redeemer Who, as a result, was declared the Sinner that you might be declared a saint. It is through this Good News, of the Son of God crucified and risen, that people are drawn to Jesus.

Christ comes to Bethlehem and in the matter of minutes, even seconds, the Word goes forth and His brethren return to Him. To shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night, an angel of the LORD announces the Good News of a great joy that shall come to all the people ... "That to you is born this day, in the City of David, a Savior Who is Christ the LORD." That Word of the Savior comes and the shepherds enter the Presence of the LORD. The Redeemer of the world is born and the Star of David shines over the little Judean town of Bethlehem. Gentiles in the east who walk in

darkness see this great light and, because of the Word of Promise received centuries earlier in the land of Babylon when Jesus' kinsfolk were taken captive and the Word went with them, the Magi are drawn to Bethlehem to worship the King of the Jews.

But notice something. He does not come to you, O Bethlehem Ephratha, to sit with the scepter and to be served. The LORD, through His prophet, Micah, promises that "He shall stand and feed His flock." Jesus, the Shepherd of Bethlehem, is standing in the midst of His congregation and feeding His own even as He is lying in His mother's arms and nursing at her breast. Even as He sleeps, this silent Word is pleading. His Messianic mission continues, even from Bethlehem. The Good Shepherd has come to serve and to give His Life as a ransom for the many.

Here is the One of Whom it is written, "I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered" (Zechariah 13:7). Thus does Jesus go to the cross in the strength of the LORD. In the Majesty of the Name of the LORD His God, Christ is crowned with thorns. In this strength the Shepherd ascends to the throne of the cross in the strength of God and, in the quiet majesty of the Lord of Lords, He atones for the sins of the world. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

Though the Shepherd has died, yet does He live, for on the third day He rose again from the dead. Then, with the Word going forth, the rest of His brethren return to Him as He invites His own to "come unto Me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). Thus He stands and feeds His flock by saying, "Take and eat; this is My Body given into death for you. Take and drink; this Cup is the new testament in My Blood shed for you for the remission of sin." Jesus, the Shepherd of Bethlehem, does this today as He stands among us and feeds us. As a result the people of God "dwell secure, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth."

O Bethlehem, what a place that was! In Jacob's night "a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the LORD stood above it" (Genesis 28:12-13) and declared that Jacob was in the Presence of the LORD God, that He was with Jacob and, though scattered in all directions, that the families of the earth would be blessed because of the Incarnation of the Son of God, "for nor He shall be great to the ends of the earth." "Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, 'Surely the LORD is in this place and I did not know it. ... And he called the name of that place Bethel' (Gen. 28:16 & 19), which means "House of God."

O Bethlehem, what a place that was! In the Judean night the angels of God, between their descending and ascending, hymned the Good News that the LORD was Emmanuel, and declared that He had come down from heaven and that, if you will, He was at the foot of the ladder ... wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. For this had been God's promise and those who were in His presence were blessed, and not them only, but also all who gather where Immanuel has promised to be.

And because "He shall be great to the ends of the earth," it may be said, "O Bethlehem, what a place this is!" So when you awoke this morning from your sleep and heard the words at the beginning the sermon, "Good morning, Bethlehem," you might have thought that this was only a symbolic greeting addressed to that little town in Judea, the one a few miles from Jerusalem and two thousand years in the past. Indeed, this is not the situation. Your pastor was speaking not only of the them, then and

there, but to the you, here and now ... to this little flock gathered here this festival day in the Name of the LORD, to this beloved congregation, ... he was speaking also to you, for you are Bethlehem because you are in Bethlehem ... a word which means "the House of Bread."

Jesus, the Shepherd of Bethlehem, is the Bread from Heaven, the Manna from above, and He has come to His House. It is here, in the Divine Service, that He is present ...

And He shall stand and feed 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.

Like Jacob, we believe, teach and confess, "Surely the LORD is in this place." Here, O Bethlehem, in the gracious Presence of God Who feeds His flock through Word and Sacrament .... here is where there is eternal Life in His Name and salvation proclaimed, and this is only most certainly true because you are forgiven in the Name of the Father and the (+) Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.