

Micah 5: 2-5a; Luke 1: 39-55 Coming to You This Christmas

Micah 5: 2-5a But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule 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 labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred 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 live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.

Today is the fourth and the last Sunday of Advent, which means our time of waiting for the birth of our Savior is almost over! Yet, it was only three Sundays ago, yes, mere three weeks, we entered this season of waiting that is Advent. Even in the time of instant gratification we live in, that's not a long time, is it?

The Biblical truth be told, the people of God has been waiting for a long, long time.... Waiting for what? The same thing we're waiting for: the fulfillment of God's promise that One who is after God's own heart will come to rule the world. Because this one will have power over all the earth, all peoples will live in security and with stability, and this One will bring wholeness to our world; people will no longer be scattered and divided but live in peace and unity.

The words of the prophet Micah which I just read, spoke of this promise of God to give hope to the people of Israel living at the end of 8th century BCE.... That is like 700+ years before Jesus was born. What's more, Prophet Micah says the origin of that promised ruler is from of old, from ancient days, even from Micah's time. Going back even further in time, Micah was thinking of the promise that God had made to David, the beloved king of Israel who was from Bethlehem, an insignificant town that was smallest in the tribe of Judah.

And the time was bad for the people of Israel when Micah delivered these words to them. Politically, the kingdom of Israel had become polarized and split into the Northern and the Southern kingdoms, and the northern kingdom had succumbed to a foreign power, the Assyrians, who was now threatening the southern kingdom of Judah by military might.

Socially, Judah's economy had grown, and it transitioned from a barter society to a commercial society where money was traded for goods. Along with this change, corruption and hypocrisy grew. The social system was starting to be controlled by people with money, who would take advantage of those without it. Prophet Micah was very concerned about the growing injustice; people were turning away from God's way of doing justice and loving mercy. Micah saw that the people were facing threat to their national identity. At the time when people were

struggling to live as the people of God, Micah delivered the words of hope that a ruler of God's own choosing would bring healing to the world. The society seemed hopelessly lost, but God's promise will stand; God will save God's people by raising a ruler.

Just look around our world today and you will see, our waiting is the extension of their waiting, from of old, from ancient days. Our Advent is not that short after all.

Let us turn now to another moment in time, several centuries after the time of Micah actually, to the moment of fulfillment of this promise. Listen now to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to Luke 1: 39-55.

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

And Mary said,

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever.'

We began the season of Advent with the words of Jesus describing the signs we will see when the kingdom of God is drawing near; the signs that will appear to us like the world turned upside down, a heavenly shake-down. And when the kingdom of God arrives, our world will be changed forever, because all that has stood in the way of our union with God will pass away. What comes at the end of the world as we know it, is the beginning of the world that we could now only wished for; the world of peace, joy, and love that is beyond our imagination. That's the promise of God. We know the world that we live in is not that world.

Then on the 2nd and 3rd Sundays of Advent, we listened to John the Baptist, calling us to prepare the way of the Lord, in the words of Prophet Isaiah; valley shall be filled, and mountain and hill shall be made low, the crooked be made straight and the rough ways smooth. People who had come to John to be baptized asked him what they needed to do exactly. John gave them

practical answer: as you go about your daily business, care for the needy and practice truth and justice. And people started to wonder if John was the Messiah, so John told them someone greater than him was coming, who would baptize them with the Spirit and fire; that would be Jesus.

Today, the Gospel reading brings us back to the moment in time before these 2 great men were even born. Before these two men came onto the scene, speaking of the coming kingdom of God, 2 women of lowly state, were experiencing the power of God in real time, in their very bodies. By the power of the Spirit, Elizabeth became pregnant and gave birth to a baby who became John the Baptist. So also, Mary conceived the baby Jesus by the power of the Spirit.

To call women in that society in those days “women of lowly state” is redundant, for women were of lower state than men, but these two women, were “lowly state” in more ways than one. Elizabeth was of advanced age and had been without child, in the society where the worthiness of women was directly linked to the ability to bear children. Mary was “lowly state” in the double sense that she was unwed and pregnant.

Yet, it was to them the Spirit descended God was about to fulfill God’s promise through Elizabeth and Mary. In fact, God leaned on these 2 women to make good on the promise God had made to the king David. Just as Micah had said that the ruler of God’s own choosing would come out of the insignificant, small town of Bethlehem, God chooses people and places that the world pays no attention to. Over and again, in the history of God and God’s people recorded in the Scriptures, God chooses people whom the world considers disadvantaged, weak, or considered “less than” to carry out God’s plan to save the whole world.

These two women trusted not in their capacity but in God’s power to do great things through them. They could not be out in the public to be acknowledged, but they had each other to bear witness to the reality that they were carrying the dreams and hopes of the world. They gladly and fearfully became the portal for God to touch the world of humanity. God chose to come into the world, to dwell with us, by first giving birth, through them, to one to prepare the way, and the other to be the way. In that sense, Elizabeth, Mary, John, and Jesus, they were all God-sent. And so are we.

The moment of fulfillment that came to Elizabeth and Mary is now coming to you this Christmas. For Jesus Christ who was born of Mary long ago and has returned to God in heaven, is leaning on us to be born in us, to dwell in us, to touch the pain of the world with his healing

love. To receive Christ as our Lord and Savior is connect our lives to the lives of those who went before and who will come after you, the rest of humanity, and join Elizabeth and Mary.

We, too, are part of God's saving Plan. We, too, are called to carry the Christ child. So, Ladies, and Gentlemen, "Coming to You this Christmas" is the birth of the Christ in you and through you, born here in the little village of Jemez Springs, at the time our world is facing great challenge of wars and other kinds of violence, like poverty, injustice, and lack of compassion and mercy.

The same Spirit that chose Elizabeth and Mary has chosen to bless you with the greatest gift of all to the world. It is the Fourth Sunday of Advent. It is the moment to add that final touch to the nursery that is your life, to welcome the Christ child. For, once he arrives, Love will grow in your heart and change your life forever.