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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 28, 2014
Sunday after Christmas

Scripture Lessons: Hebrews 1:1-6; Luke 2:22-32

Hymns: 90, 108; 99; 97 (96:1,2,5)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Micah 5:1-3

Now gather yourself in troops,

O daughter of troops;

He has laid siege against us;

They will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek.

2 "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."

3 Therefore He shall give them up,

Until the time that she who is in labor has given birth;

Then the remnant of His brethren

Shall return to the children of Israel. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God my Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Mary Did You Know?

This popular Christmas carol poses that question about what Mary would have known about this Baby that was born to her in Bethlehem, the small town foretold as the birth place of our Savior in this prophecy before us this morning. I think many people listening to this carol may assume that the answer was that Mary didn't know; that she would have been very much surprised to know that Jesus was indeed the Son of God, and that He would later in life do many miracles including making the lame walk and the blind see and the deaf to hear. Many of these things are truly amazing miracles, but they were all foretold by the prophets that the Messiah would do such things. However, the truly great truth that Mary also knew was that this Child she held in arms was also her Savior.

The prophecy before us this morning is often thought of as the prophecy that actually names the birthplace of our Savior. It is the scripture which the scribes quoted to wicked King Herod when he wanted to find Jesus and kill Him. However, the significance of this prophecy was much greater than this for those others who truly desired to know when and where the Savior would be born. --

THEME: The Birth of the Ruler to Rise out of Bethlehem Foretold.

Timing was critical. When was the Savior to appear on the scene? The opening words of our text call to mind the fulfillment of a much earlier prophecy regarding the self-rule of Israel, and the center of power being found with Judah.

I. The Scepter Departs From Judah.

Micah 5:1 “Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; He has laid siege against us; They will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek.”

During Micah's ministry the fall of Samaria and the northern kingdom of Israel to the Assyrians was imminent. Hezekiah, who ruled at the end of Micah's ministry, would end up paying tribute to Assyria for a time. Though miraculously delivered from the Assyrians, Hezekiah in a moment of weakness and pride, showed off the wealth of Judah's treasure houses to a Babylonian envoy,

and things were set in motion for the fall of Jerusalem a century later, while Hezekiah's grandsons and great-grandsons reigned in Jerusalem. The scepter would depart from Judah for their armies would be weak before the armies of Babylon and unable to face them effectively. Intrigue against Babylon would bring on the final siege and the enemies of Israel would strike the judge of Israel, the kings who sat upon the throne. They had misled the people so they would forsake God to walk in idolatry. What followed was hundreds of years of being a serf state under the control of Babylon, and then Persian, and then Greek rulers, and finally Rome.

So Micah is foretelling the timing of the coming of the Messiah in a manner that is both accurate, and yet to the mind of man, very broad. It would be some hundreds of years after Micah presented this prophecy that the Savior would actually be born, but it was a sign that should have awakened plenty of the faithful to watch for the Lord's coming.

That in itself is an important lesson for us. Since we now live some 20 centuries after the Savior's birth it is increasingly easy for us, with the passing of so much time, to become rather inattentive to the signs and prophecies as we wait for Jesus to reappear. The Lord is patient and enduring and what seems an interminably long time is not so long for the Lord, for with the Lord a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day (2 Peter 3:8).

II. Bethlehem Produces the New Ruler of Israel

Micah 5:2 "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."

Yes, Bethlehem was the town from which David had come, but David's glory was distant memory, vastly diminished. In spite of the fact that David had been born in Bethlehem it had never become more than the small town it had been for generations. That continued to be true not only in the days of Micah, but on down through the centuries, right up to the time when Jesus was born there in that stable outside the inn. Bethlehem's call to fame had

only been that fact that David had been born and raised in the hills of Bethlehem. Now King David's greater Son was also born there, just as the prophet Micah had spoken, and that would be remembered forevermore.

What exactly made this new Ruler greater than King David? In earthly terms perhaps this is kind of elusive. Jesus was not the mighty general who went out leading armies and killing Israel's earthly enemies. Jesus did not through off the shackles of Rome, as so many had hoped that He would, including His disciples. Jesus did not establish a temporal kingdom that would be noted as an empire next to the Greeks and Romans.

This Ruler came forth to God. This makes the nature of the kingdom a bit clearer, for Jesus' kingdom was not of this world. Jesus' kingdom was the kingdom of heaven. His service was to bring together the people of God.

Also Jesus' origins date back to before His birth, something that cannot be said of any normal earthly ruler. This Ruler dates back to times of old, indeed "from everlasting." "His goings forth" expresses more than mere existence. This Ruler's goings forth, His involvement in the events and history of this world, date back to the very beginning. It was emphasized in our epistle lesson this morning that it was thorough Him that the worlds were made and that this Ruler was and is the One who upholds all this by the word of His power. Without "His goings forth," without His active involvement in the universe and in this world, all the universe and all that is in this world would come crashing down.

Now this is the One who came down to earth and was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem of Judea. He is the eternal God to whom the Lord has entrusted all judgment and power so that "**He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love**"(TLH87:4).

His glory brings blessings to others as Micah speaks of --

III. The Glory of Israel being Restored.

Micah 5:3 “Therefore He shall give them up, Until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; Then the remnant of His brethren Shall return to the children of Israel.”

The Lord handed the people of Israel over to their enemies. He gave them up to be controlled by foreign powers, by emperors and tyrants for hundreds of years. He gave them up until the time when the Virgin Mary would give birth to her first-born Son, who was and is the Son of God. That act was an act of God, not only on the surface with the evident miracle of the virgin birth, but also with this being the Lord’s opening move of bringing back His people.

Now we need to look again at whom the Lord calls His people Israel. There are many who read these words and would limit the definition to the physical descendants of Abraham. Then this verse of Scripture would need to include the return of the remnant of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity which lasted only 70 years after the first prisoners were taken into captivity. However, this verse makes specific reference to Jesus’ birth. It makes specific reference to Jesus’ rule and the establishment of His kingdom. What the Lord declares here is the inclusion of the Gentiles in the number of His people Israel. We also are now included among the chosen people of God. We also are included in the restoration of the remnant of Israel.

The true glory of Israel has been restored in that Jesus has purged us from our sins, and called us to be His own special people. As His people He will guard and keep us safe from our enemies and from all who would steal us away from Him, or steal His truth away from us. He will keep us safe unto eternal life.

“Mary, did you know?”

Did she really understand all this about that Baby boy she held in her arms, that He was in truth the great “I AM?” Did she really understand that He had been born into this world so that He might be the Savior of all the world, and bring us the light and the glory of His people Israel?

Yes, I am sure she did, most of it anyway. Surely there were details that she learned as things went along, how much all this would dominate her Son’s life, even from His youth. But yes, I think she

knew more than we realize. That's really the point we need to visit. When we read this or other prophecies of Scripture. When we read the account of Jesus' birth, or His life and ministry, learning of His teaching and His miracles, and then of His passion, death, and resurrection, do **we** realize the greatness of the truth and what all this means? In all this do **we** see the Ruler of Israel establishing His Kingdom of Peace and then Glory? Did you know that when He was born into Bethlehem that He had you in mind, you personally, you and your salvation?

Know that He did, and that you were included in that act of love and in that good news which shall be to all people, for there in Bethlehem there was born to you a Savior who is Christ the Lord!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.