

“O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie.” Do you know the story? In 1865, the year our Civil War came to an end, a pastor from Philadelphia makes his pilgrimage to the Holy Land. For Christmas Eve, he rides horseback to Bethlehem; he rides through the fields and hills around Bethlehem, then goes to church in Bethlehem. A couple year’s later, back home, he writes, “O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie.” The pastor who wrote the lyrics and the musician who composed the music figured the Sunday School would sing their Bethlehem Christmas carol that Sunday after Christmas, and then it would lie still never to be heard again. Instead we’re still singing “O little town of Bethlehem” almost 160 years later.

The truth is: we don’t know if Bethlehem was peaceful and still that night Jesus was born. We don’t know if Bethlehem was small-town quiet, or if the local inn was throwing a shindig that night and that’s why there was no room in the inn for Mary and Joseph. For that matter, we don’t know if Micah thought of Bethlehem as quiet and peaceful.

Our lesson doesn’t start off quiet and peaceful or in Bethlehem. We’re in Jerusalem, the fortress city of Judah, the royal city of the rulers of Judah. And it’s not quiet or peaceful. The bugles are blowing, the horns are calling the soldiers in. For what? At first, it seems to celebrate, to crush their enemies and to celebrate. God has gathered the enemies of his people together. God has made Jerusalem strong; he has made his people strong to stomp on and crush their enemies. But what’s

the next thing we hear from Micah? **“A siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel’s ruler on the cheek with a rod.”** The enemies God would gather for Jerusalem to crush, first they would attack and surround Jerusalem and squeeze the life out of her. Before Jerusalem gets to celebrate, she would be shamed. As her rulers are slapped and shamed, she would be slapped and shamed. First it was the Assyrians, then the Babylonians (after Micah, one after another of Jerusalem’s kings were taken captive to Babylon). Then it was the Moabites and Samaritans; then the Medes and Persians, then the Greeks with the Ptolemies and Seleucids and the Old Testament anti-christ Antiochus. (This past summer we heard about that from Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah.) Just when things looked up with the Maccabees and Hanukkah, Jerusalem’s leaders slapped and shamed themselves. Then it was the Romans with the Herods, then Pontius Pilate, and more Herods and Romans. Before Jerusalem would get to celebrate, she would be slapped and shamed.

As long as God’s people wanted to play with the world, think and live like the world ... as long as God’s people thought the powers of this world could make life right for them ... God would have them slapped and shamed by the world, slapped and shamed with the world. Jerusalem, the power of the people, could not and would not make life right for God’s people. The power of Jerusalem, the power of the people, was in for a slapping and a shaming.

Dare I say: a nice reminder for us. If we think the powers of this world will make life right for us, like Jerusalem thought then, whatever powers of this world we think will make life right

for us, however great and glorious they think they are, however great and glorious we might think they are - whoever looks to the powers of this world to make life right for them is in for a slapping and a shaming. God has a different way to make life right for his people.

“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 ...” Today, Bethlehem struggles. It struggles as an Arab and Palestinian town in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. It struggles as Christians are squeezed out by more and more Jewish settlements squeezing in around them. It struggles to be seen as a safe and welcoming place for Christian tourists wanting to see “O Little Town of Bethlehem.”

Back in the day of Micah, I don't know if there was much of a tourist trade. If Bethlehem had a “Welcome to Bethlehem” sign, on that sign could have been Bethlehem's claim to fame - “Birthplace of King David,” and Bethlehem's claim to shame - “Population Too Small to Matter.” Back in the time of Joshua when God's people first moved in, Bethlehem was too small to matter. Even after it became known as the birthplace of King David, at the time of Micah and later when Joseph and Mary were looking for a place to stay - Bethlehem was still too small to matter. Too small to matter in the eyes of the world, but not in the eyes of God.

Small-town Bethlehem is where God chose the youngest of Jesse's sons, the shepherd-boy David, to be king of his people. Small-town Bethlehem is the birthplace that God chose for the

birth of his own Son who would be the forever King of his people.

Micah tells us something about this future and forever Ruler King - **his origins are from of old, from ancient times**, from the days of eternity. Think about that. The future Ruler-King that God is promising is from the past, the ancient past, the forever days of eternity past. How can that be? We'll hear it on Christmas Eve. At the same time that Micah preached as God's prophet, Isaiah proclaimed God's sign: **"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will come him Immanuel."** You know what Immanuel means - "God with us." Then Isaiah preached out: **"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."** How can Micah's future forever Ruler-King come from God's forever past? Micah's future forever Ruler-King is the Son of God, God himself.

And what will he do? I want to tell you. I want to skip over the next verse. In fact, some years on Christmas Eve I think I do skip the next verse. Why? Because it sounds so bitter-sweet. **"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."** First, the bitter - **"Israel will be abandoned."** The northern ten tribes of Israel would be abandoned to the Assyrians and gone forever. The southern kingdom of Judah would be handed over to the Babylonians and then the Medes and Persians, then the Greeks, then the Romans. And then what? The sweet. Luke tells us: **"In those days**

Caesar Augustus issued a decree So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David He went there to register with Mary ... who was expecting a child. [And] while they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.” Sweet. And Micah has more sweetness for us - **“the rest of his brothers [will] return to join the Israelites.”** That’s us. That’s you and me, God’s gentile people, Jesus’ gentile brothers and sisters. That’s right, we get to see ourselves in our lesson; we get to see Micah’s forever Ruler-King as our forever Ruler-King.

And what will he do? Now I get to tell. **“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. And he will be their peace.”** Remember the first line of our lesson? **“Marshal your troops, o city of troops.”** Micah doesn’t picture our Ruler-King as a soldier or even as a general, but as a shepherd. **“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. And he will be their peace.”**

Let there be no doubt. Micah is pointing to Jesus, the Good Shepherd himself. Listen to what Jesus says for you: **“I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down my life for my sheep. ... My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can**

snatch them out of my hand.” Our Good Shepherd lays down his life. As the Lamb of God he takes the sins, our sins, that would have God slapping and shaming us forever. And he is slapped and shamed on the cross for us. Then, as the Son of God he takes back his life, and instead of taking hold of our sins and holding them over us, he takes hold of us and holds us close to his heart - forgiven and right with God, forgiven for life with God.

“And he will be their peace.” Sometimes I like to think of peace as an economy that watches out for me. Sometimes I like to think of peace as a health-care system that watches out for me. Sometimes I like to think of peace as my wife and my family and all of you, all my world, smiling at me. Micah points us to a better peace - Jesus. With Jesus we have a peace better than any power in this world, a peace better than any smile in this world. With Jesus we have peace and life with God - **“The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want. ... Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”** Amen.

THE SERVICE

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we seem to live in a world that has bought into "bigger is better."

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... Our Lord shows us how he up-ends our world's thinking with Jesus.

INVOCATION

M: In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

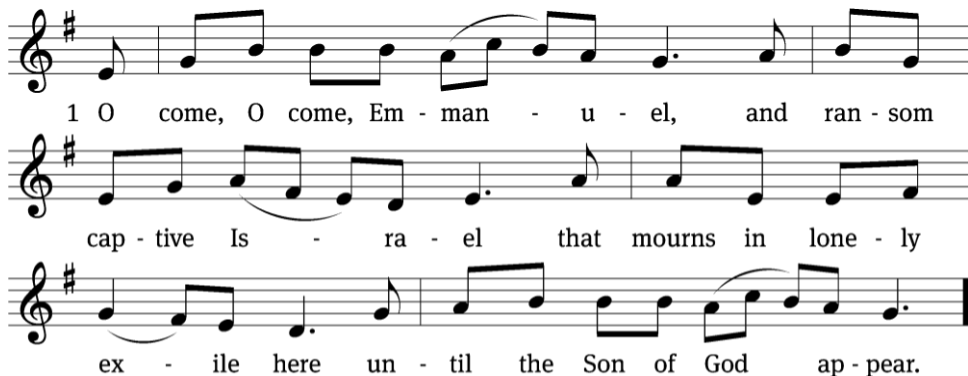
C: **Amen.**

CONFESSION OF SINS AND LIGHTING RITE

M: When God created the world, he made the crown of his creation - the human race - in his image (Genesis 1:26). Perfect people lived in a perfect world in a perfect relationship with God.

C: **But mankind rebelled against God, bringing sin into the world and death to all. God declared the wages of sin to be death (Romans 6:23). We too are guilty, and we confess our sinful thoughts, words, and actions.**

M: However, God - who is Love - did not want to be separated from his children forever. He promised a Savior who would bear the punishment for sin, defeat the devil, and break the bonds of death.



1 O come, O come, Em - man - u - el, and ran - som
cap - tive Is - ra - el that mourns in lone - ly
ex - ile here un - til the Son of God ap - pear.

Refrain

Re - joice! Re - joice! Em - man - u - el
shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

M: When the time had fully come, God sent his Son. Jesus, our Savior, has paid the ransom for your debt; your sins are forgiven (Galatians 4:4,5). In view of God's mercy, today we light the love candle. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him (1 John 4:9).

C: **This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10).**

O, come, my Love, who gives to me Grace un - de - served, un -
end - ing, free. Help me to share this gift most rare
That all, God's hope and peace, may share. Re-joice! Re-joice!
Em-man - u - el Shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

M: In the love of God we go to the world - to our friends, relatives, acquaintances and neighbors. We regard no one from a worldly point of view. If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5: 16-18).

C: We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. Jesus, who had no sin, became sin for us; in him we have become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:19-21).

Refrain

Re - jice! Re - jice! Em - man - u - el
shall come to you, O Is - ra - el!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the burden of our sins, and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Micah 5:1-5a

Marshal your troops now, city of troops,
for a siege is laid against us.
They will strike Israel's ruler
on the cheek with a rod.

"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."

Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.

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.

And he will be our peace.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 85A

Refrain



LORD, in your mer - cy hear my prayer; your good-ness nev - er fails.

Tone



You, LORD, forgave the iniquity of your / people
and covered / all their sins.

You set aside / all your wrath
and turned from your fierce / anger.

Show us your unfailing / love, LORD,
and grant us your sal- / vation. *Refrain*

I will listen to what God the / LORD says;
he promises peace to his / people.
Surely his salvation is near those who / fear him,
that his glory may dwell / in our land.
Love and faithfulness meet to- / gether;
righteousness and peace kiss each / other.
**Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
and to the Holy / Spirit,
as it was in the be- / ginning,
is now, and will be forever. / Amen. Refrain**

SECOND READING

Hebrews 10:5–10

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;
with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.

Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—
I have come to do your will, my God.’ ”

First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” —though they were offered in accordance with the law. Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel. Alleluia.

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

And Mary said:

"My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has been mindful
of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed,
for the Mighty One has done great things for me—
holy is his name.
His mercy extends to those who fear him,
from generation to generation.
He has performed mighty deeds with his arm;
he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
He has brought down rulers from their thrones
but has lifted up the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
but has sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
remembering to be merciful
to Abraham and his descendants forever,
just as he promised our ancestors."

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

EXPLANATION TO THE SECOND ARTICLE

I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death.

All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally.

HYMN OF THE DAY

“Holy Is Your Name”

Hymn 956

My soul is filled with joy as I sing to God, my Savior.
You have looked upon your servant, you have visited your people.

Refrain

And holy is your name through all generations!
Everlasting is your mercy to the people you have chosen,
and holy is your name.

I am lowly as a child, but I know from this day forward
that my name will be remembered, and the world will call me blessed.

Refrain

I proclaim your pow’r, O God! You work wonders for your servants;
you have scattered the proudhearted, you have lifted up the lowly.

Refrain

To the hungry you give food, send the rich away with nothing.
In your mercy you are mindful of the people you have chosen.

Refrain

In your love you now fulfill all you promised to your people.
I will praise you, God, my Savior, everlasting is your mercy.

Refrain

And holy is your name through all generations!
Everlasting is your mercy to the people you have chosen,
and holy is your name.

SERMON

Micah 5:1-5a

HYMN

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

Hymn 333

O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by;
yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.
The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.

For Christ is born of Mary, and, gathered all above
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King and peace to all the earth.

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ enters in.

O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray;
cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Immanuel!

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Gracious Lord, you sent your Son into our world to destroy the power of Satan and to restore our human race as your children and heirs. Work in us during this Advent season so that we may rejoice in the coming of our Savior and long for his coming again.

Make us eager to receive the King who comes to save us.

Use the preaching of your holy law to rid us of all delusions that sin is acceptable or that we can gain your love by what we do. Move us to realize how detestable our sin is to feel sorrow for what we have done wrong.

Lead us to be honest about our sin and our need for a Savior.

Lift up our hearts to see the King who comes to save. Lead us to marvel at his willingness to take on our human form and stand in our place. Show us the power he extends in his Word and sacraments to make us your children and keep us in faith. Thrill us with his promise to come and take us to our eternal home to live with you forever.

Open our eyes to see and believe the wonders of the Savior's love.

As we live with Christ and trust in him, move us to exercise the strength of his Holy Spirit so we turn from sin and all temptation. When we fall, forgive us and renew us to love and serve you and all people.

Empower us and guide us to walk with Christ by faith.

Protect us from the distractions that come at this time of the year. Even as we celebrate Christmas as a holiday, keep our hearts focused on your holy day gift of Jesus.

Give us joy, not only in Christ's coming at Christmas, but his coming in the gospel, and his coming on the last day.

Move us to share with others the most important gift of this season, the truth about Jesus. Lead us to pray for those whose joy is diminished because of sickness, pain, or loss.

[Especially bless... here name the person and the cause of the petition.] Even in our busy times, give us opportunities and the heart to help those in need.

May others see the love of Christ in our words and actions.

Hear us, Lord, as we pray in silence.

Silent prayer

Lord, shine through the distractions of this season so that our joy and faith also shine through - for your glory and the good of your people!

Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

CLOSING PRAYER

Blessed Lord, you have given us your Holy Scriptures for our learning. May we so hear them, read, learn, and take them to heart that, being strengthened and comforted by your holy Word, we may cling to the blessed hope of everlasting life; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen.

BLESSING

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

"Savior of the Nations, Come"

Hymn 301

Savior of the nations, come; Virgin's Son, make here your home.

Marvel now, O heav'n and earth, that the Lord chose such a birth.

Not by human flesh and blood, by the Spirit of our God
was the Word of God made flesh, woman's offspring, pure and fresh.

Wondrous birth! O wondrous Child of the virgin undefiled,
though by all the world disowned, yet to be in heav'n enthroned!

From the Father's throne he came and ascended to the same,
captive leading death and hell. High the song of triumph swell!

Praise to God the Father sing, praise to God the Son, our King,
praise to God the Spirit be ever and eternally.

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Join Us This Holiday Season!

Christmas Eve Candlelight Service - 5 pm

Christmas Day Festival Service - 9 am

New Year's Eve Service/Lord's Supper - 5 pm

Join us for our annual Game Night after the service!

From Your EveryOne Outreach Team -

Be gregarious (thanks, word of the day calendar!) and welcoming to our Christmas guests! Engage them as warmly as you can! Remind them of our days and times of services and invite them to return!

