

BIBLE STUDY
December 17, 2018
The Fourth Sunday of Advent
Micah 5: 1-4a
Psalm 80
Hebrews 10: 5-10
Luke 1: 39-45

1. Micah 5: 1-4a

Micah is one of the Minor Prophets. He prophesied during the same time as Isaiah. He was from the country and came to the city of Jerusalem to preach. He condemned the social injustice in Judah. He was very much a “gloom and doom” prophet with a few hopeful sayings of salvation. The most famous verse from Micah is 6: 6-8.

The passage for this Sunday is a prophecy that the “Messiah”—whom Micah would have seen as a successor to David who would rule as he did. This ruler would come from Bethlehem, the city of a David. In Matthew, this verse is quoted by the chief priests and scribes to let Herod know where the Messiah was to be born.

v. 2 reminiscent of Isaiah 7:14 a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call him Emmanuel.

v. 2 give them up= let them be, leave them in their sinful ways. Then the rest of his kindred shall return to the children of Israel. They will return to the ways of the Lord.

v.3 He will be a shepherd invested with the power and strength of God. The people will dwell in security because of his greatness which extends to the end of the earth. He will be peace: he will not only symbolize peace. He will actually bring about Harmony and wholeness.

2. Psalm 80

A community lament in the time of military defeat using the familiar image of Israel as a vineyard. The people complain that God has broken down the wall was guarding the one beautiful vine brought out of Egypt. They pray that God will again turn to them and use the Davidic king to lead them to victory.

“Rouse your power and come to save us!”

3. Hebrews

Hebrews is an anonymous work addressed to Jewish Christians whom the author believes maybe in danger of losing their faith due to weariness of following the Christian way. He speaks to them about Jesus in Jewish sacrificial terms that are familiar to them from their Jewish roots. The sacrifice of Jesus is far superior to the sacrifice of animals in the temple. Jesus is the High Priest who offered himself in obedience to the Father on the cross. He is a High Priest who understands our weakness because he himself was tempted and tried in every way and did not sin. Also, as the heavenly High Priest he enters the Holy of Holies of heaven and leads us forward with him.

10:5 a passage from Psalm 40: 7-9 is placed in the mouth of Jesus at his Incarnation. God does not want animal sacrifices but the sacrifice of obedience.

“But a body you prepared for me.” The body becomes the instrument by which Jesus can offer obedience to the Father.

Jesus’ obedience is the pleasing sacrifice to God.

By his Incarnation (taking a body) he nullifies the old covenant and inaugurates the new covenant.

Jesus’ will—his obedience—consecrates us

This reading is used for this Fourth Sunday of Advent, because of its emphasis on Jesus’ taking a body-his Incarnation which we are about to celebrate at Christmas. It connects the Incarnation with Redemption.

4. Luke 1: 39-45

The Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth. Mary takes action on the angel’s word. Elizabeth’s pregnancy is a sign corroborating the annunciation to Mary. Both events—a virgin with child and an old woman with child—show that nothing is impossible of God. Mary’s traveling to Elizabeth is a sign of faith IN God’s promise.

For Luke, John is the last of the Old Testament prophets. He leaps in the womb of Elizabeth as the old rejoicing to see the new.

Elizabeth recognizes her unworthiness that the mother of her Lord should come to her. She recognizes the superiority of Jesus over John.

She praises Mary for her belief in God’s promise to her.

There are two patterns in the reading.

“Blessed are you among women” is a verse that has a significant biblical history Judges 4: the story of Deborah, one of the Judges of Israel, was leading Israel’s army against a Canaanite leader, Sisera. After many defeats, Deborah and her army got the upper hand against Sisera, Sisera fled to the tent of Jael. There was peace between the families of Jael and Sisera. Jael welcomed ~~her~~^{him} into her tent and promised him security. While he slept, she took a wooden spike and drove it through his skull. Deborah sang the praises of the courage of Jael by singing, “**Most blessed of women is Jael!**”

Judith: When Israel was laid siege by Persia, the people despaired because they lacked food and water in the city. Judith gave a powerful speech to the leaders and the people rallying them to courage and perseverance. She vowed that she would save the people. After praying to God, she set out to meet the King Holofernes. She was received in his court. Holofernes was smitten by the beauty of Judith and invited her to his feast. Although Judith wanted nothing to do with his Gentile feast, she pretended to

be flattered and told him that this was the most important day of her life. As Holofernes attempted to seduce her, he drank more and more wine until he passed out. She took his sword and cut off his head. She placed his head in a sack and escaped back to her people, showing them the head of Holofernes as proof of her victory and their safety. In jubilation, the people saying, "Blessed are you, daughter, by the Most High God, above all women on earth!" Judith 13: 18

By using the words, "Blessed are you among women," Elizabeth ranks Mary with the women heroes of Israel who saved them from destruction. Mary will join their illustrious company by being the mother of the Savior and thereby participating in the battle of goodness and right over sin and death.

A second pattern.

Mary is new Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant contained the rod of Moses, the tablets of the Law, and some manna. It was the sign of the presence of God among his people. It was the most sacred object of Israel.

The Ark had been captured by the Philistines. When David defeated the Philistines he prepared to bring the Ark to Jerusalem. As they transported the Ark, one of those guiding it touched it and God killed him for touching the Ark. David became afraid and was unwilling to transport the Ark any further. So, it stayed in the house of Obed-Edom for three months. God blessed the house of Obed-Edom. When David saw that Obed-Edom's house was blessed, he resumed the procession of the Ark to Jerusalem. As the Ark entered the city, David danced before the Ark.

~~Luke 12~~ Luke 1
In those days
Mary arose
And left
For a town of Judah

2 Samuel 6
On that day
David arose
And left
for Baalah of Judah

John danced with joy in
The womb of his mother
The ark

David and his people
Danced with joy before
the ark

Elizabeth was filled
With
The Holy Spirit

The Lord blessed
the whole
house of Obed-Edom

Whence to me this
That comes to me
The mother of the Lord

How
would come to me
the ark of the Lord

Mary stayed
With her (Elizabeth)
About three months

The ark stayed
in the house
three months

Mary is the Ark of the Covenant of the New Testament. Following her, we too carry the Lord within us. We must bring him to our brothers and sisters. Like Mary, we must be a source of blessing to them. May each of our meetings with them be a blessing that makes them dance for joy.

The Mother of the Lord meets the mother of the servant to serve her. We must always be the first to go to our brothers and sisters. First to serve them, first to give, first to forgive.

“Blessed is the fruit of your womb” reminds us of the prophecy of Deuteronomy 7: 12-13

The Lord your God will keep the covenant and the love that he promised your fathers. He will love you, bless you, and multiply you. He will bless the fruit of your womb.”

In Jesus, God surpassed our expectations beyond our wildest imaginings. Jesus is not only the child of the blessing; he is the Blessed One from whom every blessing comes.