**Notes for Next Sunday**

Fourth Sunday in Advent

**The Point of this Week’s Readings**

The readings forecast the coming of Jesus and what He will do for those who believe in Him.

Old Testament (Micah 5:2-5). In verse 1 a terrible situation is pictured. Jerusalem is besieged and will be taken to Babylon, Their king is blinded and led off like an animal. But beginning in verse 2 Micah gives them hope. He foretells the coming of Jesus as the good shepherd. Jesus will protect His people and bring them peace. In fact, Jesus will be the peace for believers everywhere and in all times.

Epistle (Hebrews 10:5-10). Verses 5-7 are a quote from Psalm 40:6-8. The words of this verse express Christ’s obedient submission to the Father’s will in coming to earth. The Mosaic sacrifices are replaced by Jesus’ perfect and once for all sacrifice.

Gospel (Luke 1:39-56). This gospel reading, too, is a foretelling of the coming of Jesus. The first of two parts of the text is the narrative of Mary going to visit Elizabeth to share her good news which she had just received from the angel (vv. 26-38). After high praise from Elizabeth, Mary breaks into her song which we have come to know as the Magnificat

*For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.*

OLD TESTAMENT – Micah 5:2-5

**2﻿ “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.﻿” ﻿3﻿ Therefore 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. ﻿4﻿ 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. ﻿5﻿ And he will be their peace.**

Bethlehem (v. 2) had a notable history. Benjamin, the last son of Jacob was born near the town. His mother Rachel died in childbirth and was buried here. Bethlehem had remained a small town, too small to be named among the more than 100 cities belonging to the clans of Judah. Ephrathah (v. 2) was the region in which Bethlehem was located. It would be like saying Ft. Wayne, Indiana.

This text predicts that Jesus will be born in Bethlehem. He will be a spiritual ruler over all who have faith in Him. His origin is from before the earth was created. (v. 2)

The spiritual leaders of physical Israel would lead the people away from God. God’s people would be led off into exile. Only a small group would return to Israel. At the time of Jesus’s birth those who had returned were under Roman rule. (v. 3)

Jesus would be the Good Shepherd who would *not* mislead His people. His message would spread throughout the whole world. That would provide a lasting spiritual peace. (vv. 4-5)

EPISTLE – Hebrews10:5-10

**5﻿ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ﻿6﻿ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ﻿7﻿ Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.’”﻿﻿8﻿ First he said, “Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them” (although the law required them to be made). ﻿9﻿ Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” He sets aside the first to establish the second. ﻿10﻿ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**

The writer of Hebrews uses the OT to display the testimony of the Son (v 5) and about the new covenant. Jesus sets aside the first to establish the second. His perfect sacrifice, offered in complete submission, supersedes and therefore replaces all previous sacrifices.

GOSPEL – Luke 1:39-56

**39﻿ At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, ﻿40﻿ where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. ﻿41﻿ When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. ﻿42﻿ In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! ﻿43﻿ But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? ﻿44﻿ As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. ﻿45﻿ Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”**

In verses 5-38 Elizabeth and Mary are told that they will give birth to very special babies,

Elizabeth to John the Baptist and Mary to Jesus. Mary wanted to share with Elizabeth the excitement of their astonishing conceptions (v. 39). Zechariah and Elizabeth lived somewhere near Jerusalem, where Zechariah had recently served in the temple (vv 5–20). This was no easy trip for Mary. It would require a few days and she would need to convince a companion to accompany her.

Elizabeth recognized that Mary was carrying a child who was the “Lord.” This was knowledge that only the Holy Spirit could reveal. Even more remarkably, John reacted from within her womb as well! (VV. 40-41).

Mary’s blessedness is a state of faith that grasps the future promises of God that are already beginning to come to fulfillment for her and in her. (v. 42) Elizabeth considers herself unworthy of receiving the mother of her Lord. (v. 43) She knew that Mary was to be the mother of the Messiah. Elizabeth knew that her Lord would be born a true human being, and that her trust in Him would bring her salvation. She was one of the few in Israel that understood the prophecies concerning the Seed of the woman. (v. 45).

**46﻿ And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord ﻿47﻿ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ﻿48﻿ for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, ﻿49﻿ for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. ﻿50﻿ His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. ﻿51﻿ He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. ﻿52﻿ He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. ﻿53﻿ He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. ﻿54﻿ He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful ﻿55﻿ to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.” ﻿56﻿ Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.**

Verses 46-55 form what is called the *Magnificat.* It means “glorifies.” We can find it as a canticle (song or chant) on pages 933-935 in the Lutheran Service Book. It is hymn of praise of the great works and deeds of God. It is meant to strengthen our faith and be a comfort to all.

When Mary says “God my Savior” she uses an often used title for God, especially in Psalms. It underscores not only His rescue from physical calamity but also His saving power in spiritual matters. (v. 47)

Mary humbly acknowledges herself as God’s servant (v 38). She thanks Him for exalting her through the conception of Jesus in her womb (v.48). When she uses the word “fear” (v. 50) it refers to the holy awe and respect which one has for the “Mighty One” (v. 49) of whom Mary has just spoken. In Mary’s praise she recalls the promises made to Abraham and David. (vv. 48, 55)

By “with His arm” Mary is speaking of God’s powerful acts. This is not to be taken literally because God is spirit. (v. 51)