

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 1:39-45). 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

The Ruler to Be Born in Bethlehem

2 But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. 4 And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. 5 And he shall be their peace. When the Assyrian comes into our land and treads in our palaces, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men.

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 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; 6 in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. 7 Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’” 8 When he said above, “You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings” (these are offered according to the law), 9 then he added, “Behold, I have come to do your will.” He does away with the first in order to establish the second. 10 And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering 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 1:39-45

39 In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a town in Judah, 40 and she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. 41 And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, 42 and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! 43 And why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 For behold, when the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

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).

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).