

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 22, 2024 – 4TH SUNDAY IN ADVENT

Micah 5:2-5a

2 - But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

Matthew 2: 1-6 –

The wisemen's coming to Jerusalem looking for the child who has been born king of the Jews led Herod to ask the chief priests and scribes where the Messiah was to be born. They knew the answer – they could point to the correct portion of Scripture.

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, For from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.

But they had no interest in going to see Jesus.

Luke 1:46b-55 (instead of Psalm)

Four beautiful songs or poems in the first two chapters of Luke

Song of Mary - Luke 1: 46-55 – said to Elizabeth - My soul magnifies the Lord

Song of Zechariah – Luke 1: 68-79 – said after John was born and given his name –

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them

Song of the Angels – said to the shepherds - Luke 2: 14 – Glory to God in the highest heaven

Song of Simeon – Luke 2: 29-32 – Lord, now let your servant go in peace

46-48 - My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for you, Lord, have looked with favor on your lowly servant. From this day all generations will call me blessed.

Mary's being called blessed did not mean that her life was going to be easy.

The circumstances of her giving birth were going to be very difficult and very different from what I am sure she expected and would have preferred.

("Unwanted Journeys")

A few months later she and Joseph would be fleeing to Egypt.

She probably lost her husband sometime after Jesus turned twelve.

She watched her own beloved Son die as a common criminal on a cross.

(Luke 2: 35 – Simeon to Mary – "And a sword will pierce your own soul also.")

But her being called blessed did mean that she would be used by God. God would be accomplishing His purposes through her.

Would you say that you are blessed? If so, what does that mean to you?

49 - You, the Almighty, have done great things for me and holy is your name.

Because of the Roman occupying power, some of the things that Mary was saying were very dangerous to say.

51-53 - You have shown strength with your arm and scattered the proud in their conceit, casting down the mighty from their thrones and lifting up the lowly.
You have filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

Mary believed that God would keep all of His promises.

54-55 - You have come to the aid of your servant Israel, to remember the promise of mercy, the promise made to our forebears, to Abraham and his children forever.

Luke 1: 38 – Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

Luke 1: 45 – Elizabeth – "Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."

Cf. Song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2

1 – My heart exults in the Lord; my strength is exalted in my God.

4 – The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength.

5 – Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who are hungry are fat with spoil.

The barren has borne seven, but she who has many children is forlorn.

8 - The Lord raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap.

Luke 1:39-55

It is my opinion that Mary went to Ein Karem to stay with her cousin Elizabeth because of the shame she would experience in Nazareth, being pregnant while not yet being married.

Joseph, who lived in Bethlehem, went to see Mary, who was now living much closer.

After learning that Mary was pregnant, Joseph returned to Bethlehem, planning to divorce her quietly.

It was then that the angel appeared to Joseph to tell him that Mary had conceived through the Holy Spirit.

At some point Mary returns to Nazareth and Joseph joins her in Nazareth.

Because of the decree of the emperor, Joseph was required to return to Bethlehem.

That is how Jesus came to be born in Bethlehem, fulfilling the prophecy of Micah 5.

39-40 - In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth.

41 - When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb.

Luke 1: 15 – Angel to Zechariah - Even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit.

41-44 - Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child 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 by the Lord."

46-47 - And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior."