

“Lamb with the mission” Micah 5:2-5a

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.

Therefore, he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labour has given birth;
then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel.
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. And he shall be their peace.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Why should we read the Bible? What's a big deal? Why does Jesus instruct us to remain in His Word? Why does He say that that is what truly makes us His disciples? Because that is how He speaks to us, as we read His Word.

That is how He reveals Himself to us, that is how He changes and reshapes us, our hearts and thoughts and our very lives. That is how He brings us closer to Himself, that is how He embraces us in divine fellowship with Him

That's how the Triune God brings us into His story, how He makes His story your story, how He aligns your lives with what He does, that is how we gradually learn not only what our God has done and does for us, but we also learn about Him.

As we listen to Him, we learn what kind of person He is, what His character is like, what His commitment to you is like, how passionate and determined He is about your salvation, about rescuing you from the slavery to sin and devil and death. This is why we are to remain in the Word, listening to our God. How can we not?!

But some of that Word comes from ages and ages ago. Like today's reading from Micah the prophet. Micah lived and delivered God's message at the end of the 8th century and the beginning of the 7th century before the birth of the Lord Jesus. That's quite a while ago. The verses we read today are quite well known, they are read every Christmas, as we remember and celebrate the birth of Jesus.

But, how do they matter for us? What do they reveal to us? Let's learn a few things: **the dedication of our God, the care of our God, and the strange ways of our God.** God's dedication to you, His care for you, and the strange ways of our God.

First, about God's dedication, His commitment to you. The more we know about the Triune God, the more we learn and discover what He has done for us, the more we can appreciate how incredible and out of this world our God's dedication to us is.

The Holy Spirit spoke through Micah seven centuries before Christ. Yes, Micah spoke in his time, but his prophecy also brings together past and future for his listeners. A very ancient past and a very distant future; as only the Lord of history can do it.

"O Bethlehem Ephrathah". How was Bethlehem significant? It was the birthplace of king David. And how was king David significant in the history of God's people? Because to him God Yahweh had given this promise: **"I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish His kingdom [...] and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever."** (2 Sam 7:12-13)

What the Spirit spoke through Micah, reminded of this promise, given 3 centuries earlier. But then there is something strange. On the one hand He speaks about someone who will only come in future, but on the other hand, of someone, **"whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."**

This is Micah's way to speak about the same realities which John describes in the beginning of his Gospel account: **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God [...] and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."** (John 1:1-2)

What Micah's prophecy refers to is someone highly unusual: **"He shall stand and shepherd His flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God."** What kind of description is that?! Who is He referring to?

You can guess the answer... This is how God works, guiding the flow of history, weaving together its threads, choosing and calling His servants, like David, like Micah, continually speaking to us through them, giving us hope, and working towards the ultimate fulfillment of His promises, the sending of His Son into this world as one of us. That's what this prophecy is about.

These Biblical prophecies and promises are separated by centuries and even millennia, but for our God **"a thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past."** (Ps 90:4) Such is His dedication to us; such is His commitment to His promises that He arranges the entire history of the world around them, guiding everything to His end, to New Heavens and New Earth where He will dwell among us.

But we can also see in this prophecy, how much He cares for us. And us is not some generic us. This us is made up of you and you and you, and all God's people. **"Then the rest of His brothers shall return to the people of Israel. [...] And they shall dwell secure, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth."**

For our God this is not about some generic care for humanity, no! He knows you by name, He formed you in your mother's womb, in His book were written all the day of your life, before there was any. Whatever He does, He does it for you.

Think about the grandeur of God's works, how vast periods of time it covers, we can't possibly trace them, we can't possibly comprehend what He is doing, we only get glimpses of what He has been up to for our sake.

Working out our salvation so that we can dwell secure under the wings of our Great Shepherd, for He shall be great to the ends of the earth. Yes, in other words, all the authority in heavens and earth is now given to whom?

Yes, to our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ, true man, born in Bethlehem, but also true God, whose origins are from of old, from before the earth was formed, from eternity to eternity. And then notice how the Holy Spirit speaks about us!

As His brothers, and we could add, and His sisters. This is how our God sees us, how He sees you, as His siblings, as members of His family, and we can also add - as heirs of God the Father and coheirs with God the Son, our Lord Jesus. He does care for you.

Finally, a little bit about the strange ways of our God. They are strange. One thing is the scale on which He operates, we can't comprehend what it means to give promises and to work for millennia to fulfil them, but also, the way He goes about fulfilling His promises is rather strange to us. Not what we would expect.

Through Micah God promises the ruler of His people, who will shepherd in the strengths of the Lord. We can understand the ruler, we can understand the strength, these are parts of our experiences in this world.

But God's ruling and strength are so different. There is a fascinating verse in Micah 4. It reveals us something about the ways of our God. **"And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem."** (Micah 4:8) What is that about?

And what has this verse to do with the ways of our Lord? Let's see! Where was Jesus born? As the Spirit foretold through Micah, in Bethlehem. Who was the first to come and to see the newborn baby? The shepherds. But what kind of shepherds were they?

Micah speaks about "the tower of the flock". *Migdal Eder*. It was a tower several miles from Jerusalem, very close to Bethlehem. It was near to this tower in the fields of Eder where a very special flock was kept. Those were not regular sheep.

That was where the sacrificial animals were raised and cared for not by some ordinary shepherds but the elite shepherds from the priestly tribe of Levi. Their job was to evaluate newborn lambs, and to see whether they were without blemish or spot.

It is to those shepherds that the angel of the Lord appeared and sent them to Bethlehem. To do what? **“This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”**

And what did these shepherds find when they arrived in Bethlehem? A baby lying in a manger. Do you see what this means? They were sent to see a newborn lamb of God, without a spot or blemish, the very Son of God Almighty, laying in a manger, born with the mission to take away the sin of the world. My sin and yours.

A baby, a lamb of God who was born to be sacrificed for our sins, whose death would bring to the end every other sacrifice and would grant eternal life to us who lived in the shadow of death. You have been redeemed not with gold or silver, but **“with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”** (1 Pet 1:19)
This is how strange God’s ways are dealing with us.

How do you live when you learn this? How do you see yourself and your life when someone has done this for you, when someone loves you so much, so self-sacrificially? How do you respond? How do you say “thank you”? How does that change your life?

Think about this. This is what God’s dedication and commitment to you are like, time transcending, history guiding, unshakable. This is what God’s care and attitude towards you is, He considers you a member of His family, of His royal, divine family, He looks at you as His beloved brothers and sisters, coheirs of God’s Kingdom.

And this is what His strange ways are like. This ruler, in the strength of God, comes to us as a baby, as a lamb with a very special rescue mission to accomplish. But that is not the end of the story. Soon we will see this lamb again. The circumstances will be very different. And we are told what they will be like as they were revealed in vision to John the beloved disciple of Jesus.

We will look and we will hear **“around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!”**

And we will hear **“every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”** (Rev 5:11-13)

When this day comes, may you be among those multitudes, to thank and to praise and to worship the lamb who took away your sin and gave to you His life.

Amen.