

## The Prince of Judah, from Bethlehem

Micah 5:2-3, December 19, 2010

Advent Sunday IV

Beloved of the Lord.....It doesn't take much of a study to see and realize that all the false religions of the world, one way or another must demote Christ into something less than the everlasting God Almighty in the flesh. Many say that since Jesus was the *son* of God, He could not be God. They don't understand what "only-begotten" means. Others say Jesus was just a *man* who died and didn't rise again, though Jesus said, "Destroy this temple and in three days I WILL RAISE IT UP." Still others make Jesus a good man, or a moral prophet, but not True God and Man in the flesh to save us from sin. Only God by the power of the Gospel can open our spiritual eyes to see Jesus as He is, God incarnate in the flesh, "from of old, from everlasting." Let us not consider by faith this Prince of Judah who was born in Bethlehem to save all men from sin. May His humble and lowly birth likewise cause us to humbly confess our sins, and believe in His holy name.

I. His humble birth and origin. The prophet Micah describes first of all, the humble birth and origin of this Prince. "And thou Bethlehem, Ephratah". Ephratah is a surname for Bethlehem which means fruitfulness. "Though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." Among the thousands of families of Judah, Bethlehem was unknown until a certain shepherd boy from Bethlehem became king, King David. Yet even then Bethlehem remained relatively despised or unimportant. With the birth of Christ however, Bethlehem was eventually known throughout the world. By choosing this lowly town to be the birthplace of the Prince of Judah, God indicated that His Holy and Most High Son would enter into the world with all lowliness, much like David. Bethlehem then symbolizes humility, lowliness, humble beginnings. All the wealth, glory, and riches of this world are of no importance to God, nor His children who trust in Him. When we are impressed with the world's riches, we should be careful not to stand in awe of them, or let the love of this world pull us away from the arms of our Savior. The wolf devours both sheep and lambs who love to wander away from the security the Good Shepherd alone can give. Both the riches of this world, and her sinful pleasures will burn in the fire of God's Judgment on Judgment Day. Earthly riches carry no weight in God's kingdom, and only the blood of Christ can secure heaven for sinners such as us. We should be content to be rich in His grace. Jesus is our

treasure.

This humble origin of Christ is also indicated in verse three. "Therefore will he give them up, until the time *that* she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel." The prophet Micah here warns his own people there was misery and suffering to come. For Micah's audience, the people of Judah, by and large, had fallen into idolatry. The earthly princes of Judah would not repent of their sins, nor listen to the voice of the prophets. They coveted people's houses, people's wives. They wanted everything their neighbor had, and even when they had that, it was not enough. The people under the princes were no better. They prayed thoughtlessly to idols, did not mourn or feel bad about their sins, but continued in them and would not repent. God's answer to their turning away, was HE GAVE THEM UP. The princes and people of Judah were carried away in the Babylonian captivity.

There is a truth here in the Bible we shouldn't overlook. When Christians who are taught the truth of God's Word, the truth of His commandments, turn and give themselves over to the sin, namely they do the very things they've been taught not to do, the Holy Spirit of necessity must depart and leave that heart. The Bible says, "therefore will He give them up." As Christians the only thing that restrains and keeps us from the common sins of the world (adultery, fornication, abortion, perverse sex, murder), is the Holy Spirit who lives in our heart by faith. But if we willingly choose to give ourselves over to sin, if we shake our fist at God and say "I'm going to do whatever I want to do and you can't stop me", God must in answer say, "Well it will be to your own hurt, and I cannot go along with you, I must depart." God doesn't beg us not to sin, He commands us not to sin. And so while on the one hand God could very well use His Almighty power to restrain and keep us from all sin of every sort, He doesn't force His will upon us, nor does He force us to keep His commandments. Faith works by love and Jesus wants us to obey Him because we love Him. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Jesus Himself taught us this love. For Jesus was not forced by the Father to give His life for the world. This Prince of Judah did not come because He HAD TO COME but because He wanted to. The Prince of Judah was born in Bethlehem with a willing heart, a love which surpasses all understanding.

In our text then the labor pains of a woman before birth, symbolize God's punishment for sin upon Judah before the birth of Christ. The people of Judah were carried away as slaves to a foreign land, but God in His mercy allowed them to return, "until Shiloh come." Micah prophesied that when Mary would give birth to

the Prince of Judah, a remnant of the people would return and find peace. This is a beautiful picture for us, for God in His mercy works to restore the fallen Christians to His grace. Fallen King David was restored by God's grace. Fallen Peter was restored by God's grace. If we have forsaken God's mercy and fallen into shameful sins, God in His mercy still calls sinners to repentance by the Gospel, and He has power to restore, "for unto you is born this day in the city of David and Savior which is Christ, the Lord!"

To those who are ashamed of their sin, Jesus always gives peace. This spiritual peace enables us to endure the hatred and enmity of this world. "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glories which await us." That's the way it is in God's kingdom of Grace. Outwardly we suffer every sort of hardship, poverty, loneliness, despair, persecution, strong temptations, but inwardly, spiritually we rejoice because Jesus is our peace. Being born in Bethlehem Ephratah, the man Jesus was despised and looked down upon. Jesus was a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. Jesus said, "The foxes have holds, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath nowhere to lay his head." Though God incarnate in the flesh, Jesus came in weakness, so He could be nailed to the cross for our sins. If we want to follow Him, we must put up with and endure His disgrace, His lowliness. This world will always consider us fools, but we are fools for Christ's sake. "Ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." By faith we begin in lowly Bethlehem. By faith we ascend into heavenly Jerusalem.

II. His divine majesty, hidden behind humility. And so we dare not be ashamed of this "lowly" Jesus of Nazareth. For though His birth and origin were indeed humble, lowly, whose "goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting." Consider now that when the baby Jesus was born, when His tiny little infant foot set foot upon the earth, God Almighty, had set His feet upon dry ground! Immanuel means "God with us!" And you could see God with your eyes, you could hear Him cry as a little child. Yet only those with faith were able to see and behold God, in the baby Jesus. The Savior of all flesh had come! Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and later the Wise men, were given the great honor of seeing their Lord with their own eyes, yet God was wrapped and cloaked, veiled, in true flesh and blood! What must it have been like? What was it to behold this *Seed of the Woman*, this *Shiloh*, this *I AM THAT I AM*, this *Prince of Judah*, "whose goings forth have been from of old,

from everlasting"?

This verse then, like many others, proves beyond all doubt Jesus is the eternal God, from everlasting in the past, to everlasting in the future, Alpha and Omega! Being God, I AM THAT I AM, Jesus was the Creator of time itself, but He came to us in that certain moment of time as a little Baby 2000 years ago. Six thousand years ago Jesus created the sun whereby we mark time, yet in the Gospel Jesus is the called the Sun of righteousness, with healing in His wings! "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings." If we have fallen from grace then, Jesus by His grace wishes to restore us. We should repent of our sins and turn to Jesus for mercy. Yet in the falling and returning, every Christian should understand, sin and grace in God's kingdom is a cycle. "The good that I would I do not and the evil I would not, that I do." Thus by repentance and faith again and again we must confess our sin, turn away from it, and find perfect healing in Christ. Though we cannot wash ourselves clean, Jesus' blood can. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." To believe and trust in Christ and the power of His blood, is to be washed clean of all sin by Him. By faith we are justified, made clean and righteous in God's sight. Jesus said, "Ye are clean through the Word, which I have spoken to you!"

"The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." Certainly and without a doubt, Jesus is the great I AM of Scripture. "Before Abraham was, I AM", Jesus said. As a Man, He fulfilled the law for all men, being made of a woman, and as our eternal God, Jesus had the almighty power to pay the price we could not pay. The power then of Jesus blood to cleanse, is infinite, and faith alone in Jesus is all that is necessary for our salvation, for Jesus through the Christ has done all. As many as receive Him, the Bible says, "become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name."

"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is the eternal Word, from everlasting to everlasting, whose goings forth have been of old. May His humble birth, humble us. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him. Amen.