

**Fourth Sunday in Advent**  
December 24, 2017  
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church  
Farmington, NM

**Micah 5:2-5a** “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans[a] 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 bears a son,  
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 our peace

**“Peace from Bethlehem to You”**

The fireplace casts a warm, radiant glow. Delicious, freshly baked cookies waft through the air. Presents beautifully wrapped and neatly arranged under the tree. Mom and dad in housecoats and fuzzy slippers sip warm beverages and look on the scene with angelic smiles. Children sit patiently like little cherubs at a safe distance from the tree waiting for mom and dad to distribute gifts in an orderly fashion so they can calmly unwrap each item with appreciation and gratitude.

That’s the scene we have in our minds. The one we are planning to post up on Instagram. The image that comes closest to our own little Normal Rockwell painting. We’d love to create that scene. If not that exact moment a Hollywood movie director might be able to create, at least the feeling of tranquility. We’d love to know all the planning and coordinating, all the shopping and wrapping, all the preparing and sacrificing will pay off. It will all be worth it if we can create this memorable, special experience for our loved ones this Christmas.

That’s one reason why we are here this morning. This is where we will find that adorable snow globe moment of Jesus in the manger. We will be able to witness and recreate for our hearts that precious nativity scene. Mary and Joseph gazing adoringly on the newborn Jesus. Animals silently gather around this precious infant. Shepherds and angels and wise men take their places to admire the newborn king with amazement and find their own peace from this sublime scene. Away in a Manger...Silent Night, those songs create that sublime image in my mind.

Wait just a minute. We are supposed to believe a just born baby isn't crying? Animals exhibit hospitality to unexpected intruders? Just as likely for shepherds to pop over for a quick visit bringing hot cocoa and fruitcake while angels serenade the holy family with holiday hits before everyone quietly makes an exit to leave this frazzled family in peace. And let's not even get started about when the wise men actually appeared on the scene.

So the experience of Mary, Joseph, and Jesus doesn't really match our artistic expectations. That's ok. Peace was there. And their peace is the key to our peace today.

### **1) Peace at Bethlehem**

But why Bethlehem? Compared with Jerusalem, Bethlehem was insignificant. It was the ancestral home of King David. But even he made his palace and capital in Jerusalem. Visiting dignitaries would naturally be drawn to the cosmopolitan, glamorous city just an hour and a half walk to the northwest.

But that was exactly what God had planned. Sure, a census drove them to Joseph's family home. But God had in store a humble path for his own Son. Bethlehem is the most appropriate starting place for the path to glory that connects Messiah with God's promises. It's not an accident. This is mapped out by God. Greatness comes from perceived nothingness. Deliverance appears from apparent weakness. God's plan for greatness is traced back centuries before Mary and Joseph made their trek to Bethlehem. God's plans means Jesus has to be a real person with a real heritage coming from a real family. That family has real origins in a real place. That place, Bethlehem, might be small and insignificant, overshadowed and overlooked, but it is the perfect place for peace to originate.

Is there a place you would go to have the perfect Christmas? Maybe somewhere warm and sunny, with lots of sand and palm trees? Many of us would like nothing more than to go home, to spend this Christmas with the the people who mean the most to us and who hold us most dearly. And yet, it hardly ever turns out perfect even when you are where you want to be with the people you most desire to be spending this special day with.

Do you know why law enforcement officers hate working the holidays? I had this conversation with a police officer a few years ago. I was thinking they probably hate being away from their families on special holidays. Or maybe it's extra boring since everyone else is busy. Or maybe the only calls they get are silly assignments and no real serious emergencies. Actually, this particular policeman told me, it's because of all the fights. Families get together and emotions run over. Put all sorts of people in the same house, add the fuel of alcohol, and one small word is all it takes to light the wick of domestic violence. Law enforcement officers hate getting caught in the middle of those episodes.

That doesn't prove that we are wrong to want to spend quality time with the important people in our lives. But it does prove our image of peace is so flawed. What we hope will bring us peace, the people we depend on for creating peace might actually just expose the conflicts that have been boiling beneath the surface for weeks, months or years. Wrongs

perpetrated years ago come up at unplanned moments. We struggle with the hurt and disappointment we've caused the people we love. We can mask it and disguise it and paper over it with the peace we try to create. Even if that tension never erupts at inconvenient opportunities, it's something we can't get rid of on our own. But we know we are missing out on real peace.

## 2) Peace from Messiah

That's why we need to look to Bethlehem. Bethlehem is the location that shows God intervenes in history in unexpected ways. At Bethlehem God launches his operation to rescue us from us from all our best efforts that only end in humiliating defeat. See, you can bring light to this world, but you can't get rid of the darkness. You can follow good examples and premier role models to make the world a better place, but you can never measure up to God's standard of perfection. You can create your own peace on your own terms, but can't provide the peace each human heart needs, even your own.

There's something preventing real peace for you and me. That something isn't as simple as ungrateful gift recipients or talking politics over your holiday ham. The worst kinds of tensions we face aren't results of getting the same gift twice or getting forgotten in the family gift exchange. There is a conflict between you and God. You have a default competition with God over who should have control over your life. Ever since Adam and Eve did it, we all seek glory in ourselves instead of God's will. You and I are driven by pleasing our own desires rather than living to enjoy a harmonious relationship with God. All our efforts to create our own peace put us at risk of missing out on God's lasting joy and eternal peace.

For that peace we need the baby born in Bethlehem. Micah promises Messiah who comes to do what you and I cannot do. The promised Messiah is born to pay the debt we can't pay. The promised Messiah stands to deliver what we are incapable of achieving on our own.

Micah promises one who will come out of Bethlehem. This promised Messiah will come to serve the Lord not himself or his own needs. He comes in lowliness and faith to keep him from lording his success over others and seeking praise and popularity. The majesty, power and authority of Messiah come from his relationship with God, from being completely in tune with God's chosen plan to rescue humanity. The baby born in Bethlehem **"will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God."** (Micah 5:4) Jesus comes to stand and won't be deterred from what he needs to do. Jesus comes to be the ideal ruler his people needs. Jesus comes to lead, defend, and care for his people.

Just a few days ago I saw a meme that caught my eye. It said to stop looking for the perfect gift this Christmas. Your kids will be more entertained by this simple, cheap toy instead. Even before you marvel at your children playing with the box their expensive present came in, you know it's true. You drive yourself crazy trying to find the perfect gift. But you know you should probably be focusing on good enough gifts instead.

Jesus, the baby born in Bethlehem, is the peace you can't get on your own, on your own terms, by your own efforts. That means Jesus is more than good enough. Jesus is more than just enough to satisfy you. Jesus is the perfect gift. Jesus is everything you need, whether you realize it or not. Jesus is your gift of peace.

### **3) Peace to You**

The child of Bethlehem came to take your mess. The Messiah came to stand his ground against your flawed standard of peace. Jesus battled against the accusations that rob your soul of peace when he went to the cross for all humanity. Jesus battled and defeated definitively the source of your soul's greatest tensions when he stood alive and whole outside his empty tomb.

Reconciliation comes from Jesus. His coming brings an end to your conflict with your God. Jesus works his peace from the inside out. He transforms souls through his humble coming and his rescue work. Jesus brings wholeness to your relationship with God. Jesus establishes safety and freedom from your soul's most serious oppressors.

There is no escaping some sort of conflict over the next few days. You might choke your way through a smoke filled home instead of basking in the warm glow of a radiant fire. Instead of presents you might have a handful of gift cards. Or gifts will be opened and forgotten to fight over what your brother got. The smell of burnt cookies can't be ventilated from the house without freezing everyone out. And yet, you have peace. Peace comes from a person. That peace is the baby born in Bethlehem.

Give that gift to your loved ones. Shelter under his protection when you feel under attack for not being good enough, when you feel inadequate for not providing the perfect gift and the perfect tranquil Christmas. Shelter in the peace of Jesus' perfection. Comfort in the reconciliation of your Savior when Christmas plans don't turn out the way you want. Rely on your restored relationship with God through Jesus when conflict and tension among the ones you love are unavoidable.

Whether you are settling in for a quiet night at home or traveling across multiple time zones tonight, you have something more than an Instagram worthy scene. You have a Savior born for you. If your home looks nothing like a Normal Rockwell painting, you still have real joy. You have the God-man come to be your rescuer. No matter whether you lay your head down tonight expecting an inspirational sight or dreading a disaster to greet you when you wake up in the morning, you have peace. Today you have news of a "Holy infant, so tender and mild." Born to be your Savior, born to rescue you. So that means whatever happens today, no matter what goes right or wrong, you can "Sleep in heavenly peace." Heavenly peace from the burden of making the world a better place. Jesus has provided paradise through his coming. Heavenly peace from expectations to make everyone happy on your list. Jesus gives the joy of unconditional love and acceptance. Heavenly peace from the crushing guilt and shame of feeling like you have to measure up to your own version of peace. Jesus is your restored relationship with your holy God. Peace from Bethlehem to you through Jesus Christ. Amen.