

SERMON FOR DECEMBER 23, 2018
TEXT: MICAH 5: 2-5a
THEME: O LITTLE HOUSE OF BREAD

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.

³Therefore 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.

⁴And 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.

⁵And he shall be their peace.

In the name of Jesus:

There are many Christmas traditions that people around the world celebrate: the hanging of stockings, the exchange of gifts, and the exchanging of baked goods. For many it is the Christmas cookie exchange, some Americans still give fruitcake during the holidays. My aunt and grandma used to make a Scottish puff pastry that was to eaten during the Christmas season. In Germany there is a tradition of putting a precious coin into Christmas pudding, and whoever gets it, keeps it. There is always that feeling of eager anticipation to see who will be the lucky one to get the Christmas coin. Another custom in Germany is the Christmas cake, a baked Stollen. The dough wrapping isn't anything spectacular, it looks like an ordinary loaf of bread. But inside this loaf of bread are sweet surprises, raisins, candies, and other goodies. Both of these traditions serve to remind us of God's gift of Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem, and whose birth was foretold by the prophet Micah.

Bethlehem, the little town that Jesus was born in, literally means: “House of Bread.” For people living in the Middle East during the time of Jesus, bread was a main staple of the diet. It still is a main staple even in our culture today. In the days of Micah, some 600 years before the birth of Jesus, the people of Jerusalem were literally under siege. God had declared judgment on the nation because of their unbelief. Like a woman in childbirth, the city of Jerusalem and the nation of Judah cried out in anguish. Those who lived in the city were expelled, her prestigious citizens and royalty were uprooted and taken captive into the nation of Babylon. There is calamity, destruction, desolation, and want. Just listen to how Micah described what took place in chapter four of his book: “Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, that pain seized you like a woman in labor? ¹⁰ Writhe and groan, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you shall go out from the city and dwell in the open country; you shall go to Babylon.” The great city of God was now no more. Jerusalem and its surrounding territory looked like a war zone. Its citizens were dispersed and those left behind were desperate for help, because there was no shelter, no money, no food, no help coming in their time of need.

You know what that is like, don't you? Oh, we don't live in a war zone, we live in a land of plenty. But we have all sorts of physical and financial needs. Sometimes it just feels as if we live in a war zone. You know well the struggle of paying the bills that keep on piling up, you know the cost of trying to make ends meet. You know how it feels to be fearful and wonder what will happen next. Sometimes we live our lives waiting for the other shoe to drop, what will happen

next? There is so much uncertainty in our world. To top it off, we live in a time where people are desperate and famished for love and forgiveness. People living today are angry and afraid. Instead of talking calmly about the issues we face, there is shouting and finger pointing. Television talk shows show a desperate and hurting populace. Angry rants are the norm, coming from a people who are fearful of losing what they have.

We need peace today, a peace that surpasses all human understanding. This is what Micah is prophesying about in our text for today. The prophet Micah foretells of One who is to come, who will rule in peace from the house of bread. Micah predicts that the One who will bring peace will be born in a little town called Bethlehem. Bethlehem Ephratha, too small to be even found on a map back in those days, a little town that didn't look all that special.

But from this town the Savior would come, He would be born of a virgin, and laid in a manger." 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." Bethlehem, the little town called House of Bread, would be the place where Jesus would be born. Jesus, God's one and only Son would be born in this place. The House of Bread would give birth to the One who called Himself the Bread of Life. Jesus, the One who fed the 4000 and the 5000, the One who healed the demon possessed and the lame, the One who walked on the water and quieted storms on the Sea, Jesus, God's one and Only Son, was sent from heaven to be our Savior. For Jesus said: "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never

thirst. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Jesus came down from heaven to give eternal life to all who believe in Him. Jesus gave His life on the cross, dying so that all who believe in Jesus as Savior from sin, Satan, and death will live. God’s precious Gift, Jesus, wrapped in swaddling clothes and placed in a manger, is given to all who are in need of peace. Jesus is your Peace, He is the Good Shepherd who came down to give His life for the sheep. This is what the Psalmist writes: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” Jesus is your Good Shepherd who watches over you everyday of your life.

Even as the sheep would rely on its shepherd for provisions and protection, Jesus invites you to turn to Him. He will give you the daily bread that you need. He will not lead you into temptation and Jesus will always deliver you from evil. Jesus’ invitation to all is: “Come to me all you who are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and learn form me, Jesus says, for He is gentle and lowly of heart.

Jesus is the great treasure of Christmas, the Bread of Life born in the little town called House of Bread. He is the One who was sent by God, to provide for us as

we hunger and thirst for God's love, and we have that love, that forgiveness, that peace, by a free gift of His love in Jesus.

God's gift to you this Christmas season is the birth of His only begotten Son, Jesus. He speaks to you in His Holy Word. He comes to you in, with, and under the bread and wine to forgive you and give you peace, so that you can live with certainty that God loves you in Jesus, and that He will work all things out in your life to the glory of God. God gives you peace in Jesus, knowing that nothing will separate you from His love, and that nobody and nothing can snatch you out of Jesus' love and protection. God will continue to care for you and bless you in Jesus. All so that you can not only live in the peace of God that surpasses all understanding, but also share that Good News of peace with others in Jesus. So when you take a bite out of that Christmas cookie or Christmas bread, remember that God has given to you the Bread of Life, His Son, Jesus, born in Bethlehem, all so that you might know and live in the love of Jesus.

Amen