

## Fourth Sunday of Advent Year C



Litomerice altarpiece: the Visitation

### **Micah 5.2-5a**

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.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time  
when she who is in labour has brought forth;  
then the rest of his kindred shall return  
to the people of Israel.

And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,  
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth;  
and he shall be the one of peace.

### **What's going on?**

As we approach Christmas Day, the prophet Micah announces a prophecy about Bethlehem, that it will be the place where the chosen one of God will appear. This saviour will look after the people like a shepherd looking after his flock and they will be kept safe and in peace.

### **Psalm 80**

To the leader: on Lilies, a Covenant. Of Asaph. A Psalm.

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock!

You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth  
before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.

Stir up your might,  
and come to save us!

Restore us, O God;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

O LORD God of hosts,  
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?  
You have fed them with the bread of tears,  
and given them tears to drink in full measure.  
You make us the scorn of our neighbours;  
our enemies laugh among themselves.

Restore us, O God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

You brought a vine out of Egypt;  
you drove out the nations and planted it.

### **What's going on?**

The psalmist continues with the idea of God as a shepherd. He calls on God to save his people, who have been suffering. God's face must 'shine' on his people and bring them salvation from their troubles. God chose the people, brought them out of slavery in Egypt and will remember them in their time of trouble.

### **Hebrews 10.5-10**

Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said,  
'Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired,  
but a body you have prepared for me;  
in burnt-offerings and sin-offerings  
you have taken no pleasure.

Then I said, "See, God, I have come to do your will, O God"  
(in the scroll of the book it is written of me).'

When he said above, 'You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt-offerings and sin-offerings' (these are offered according to the law), then he

added, 'See, I have come to do your will.' He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

### **What's going on?**

The letter to the Hebrews offers a theological explanation for Jesus' coming into the world. In the past, people understood the way to have a right relationship with God was to offer sacrifices of animals and other offerings. But when Jesus comes into the world, right relationship with God is not about these kind of offerings but doing God's will. The strict religious law that the people of Israel had to live by is superseded by Jesus because he became the final sacrificial offering in his own death. So people don't need to offer up sacrifices of animals and birds any more, they can just believe in Jesus. That is enough to restore (sanctify) the relationship between human beings and God.

### **Luke 1.39-45**

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. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leapt in her womb. And 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 leapt for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfilment of what was spoken to her by the Lord.'

### **What's going on?**

Luke tells us about a visit by the pregnant Mary to her relative Elizabeth who is also pregnant with the baby who will be John the Baptist. Elizabeth realises that her baby is kicking and says that he is jumping with joy in the presence of Jesus who is in Mary's womb. Elizabeth too knows that Mary has been chosen to bear God's son, and revels in the blessing

that God has bestowed on her and in Mary's obedience to God in becoming pregnant with Jesus.