

Advent 4

December 22, 2024



The tender Mother of Christ teaches us, with her words and by the example of her experience, how to know, love and praise God.

—Martin Luther—

Commentary on the Magnificat

PROCLAMATION POINTS

The following are some thoughts and questions to be used for a text study on the weekly lessons, or for jump-starting the imagination of the preacher and hearer in preparing for the proclamation event.

Micah 5:2-5a

The prophet Micah lived around 700 B.C., in the days of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Most of the kings in those days were notoriously unfaithful. Through the prophet Micah, God announced that a future King would come from the town of Bethlehem — the same town from which King David hailed.

- *What evidence do you see in these verses that someone even greater than King David is being spoken of here?*
- *How does the image of the shepherd (v.4), reminiscent of the Christmas story, at the same time testify to the role that Christ would come to serve?*

Verse 3 speaks of “she who is in labor.” The image of giving birth is not only a literal foreshadowing of Mary’s delivery of baby Jesus, it is also a metaphor for the new birth that Christ will bring about in us through faith. Just as we sing in the hymn *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, “Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today,” Jesus’ birth has both corporate and individual effects.

- *What are we asking God to do in us through Jesus’ birth? How does the theme of birth symbolize a whole new creation brought about in Christ?*

Psalms 80:1-7

This psalm picks up the shepherd imagery we saw in the first lesson, and uses it to ask God for restoration. Normally, we think of “restoration” as something done by a craftsman or contractor — fixing that which is broken. But how does this word apply in the case of a shepherd?

- *If God is our shepherd and we are called to be his sheep, what would you say is “broken” between us and God? How is fixing this kind of brokenness different from repairing a physical object or machine?*
- *In Luke 15:3-7, how did Jesus describe the Good Shepherd’s function in “restoring” the flock? What did Jesus come to do?*

Verse 5 says that God has fed his people with “bread of tears” and given them “bowls of tears” to drink.

- *How can God use sorrow and sadness to bring about positive change in our lives? Have you ever experienced this?*

Hebrews 10:5-10

The Book of Hebrews draws upon the long history and practice of temple sacrifices to say something new about Jesus. His sacrifice was like, and unlike, all those that had

come before him.

- *From your own experience of payments demanded under the law, how do you imagine most people felt about the sacrifices they were commanded to bring to the temple?*
- *Can you imagine how such a practice could have deteriorated into reluctance and “going through the motions”?*

According to the Book of Hebrews, Jesus’ once-and-for-all sacrifice on the cross put an end to the old system of animal sacrifices.

- *What was different about the new covenant that Christ brought about, that was unlike the former covenant of law?*

Luke 1:39-45 (46-56)

In this lesson is the story known as the “Visitation of Mary.” While Mary was pregnant, she went to see her older cousin, Elizabeth, who was also with child. Apparently, the baby in the elder woman’s womb sensed the presence of the unborn Savior.

- *From what you know of the story, who was the unborn baby of Elizabeth? How does this story foreshadow this child’s future mission?*

In verse 42, Elizabeth refers to Mary as “blessed” — that is, someone who has been given a blessing by God. The Greek word: εὐλογεμένη (*eulogemene*) literally means: “having good words spoken to her.”

- *In what sense is Mary’s “blessedness” not a quality of Mary herself, but the recognition of something done by God to Mary?*

In this passage of Scripture, it is not always clear which woman is being referred to by the generic pronoun “she.” For example, in verse 45, Elizabeth said, “And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.”

- *Both Mary and Elizabeth were given promises from the Lord. Is the “she who believed” in this verse a reference to Mary, or is this a reference to Elizabeth herself?*

The “optional” section of this pericope (v. 46-56) is the passage of Scripture known as the Magnificat (*mag-NI-fi-cot*), from the Latin for “magnify” (i.e. to make bigger or greater.)

- *What do you think Mary means when she says “my soul magnifies the Lord”? Can Mary make God greater? Or does it mean something about Mary’s response to the Lord?*
- *What does Mary mention as evidence of God’s faithfulness? In what sense was this both a general, historical observation and a personal confession?*