

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Fourth Sunday of Advent, Cycle C

Micah 5:1-4; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-45

Because most of us are very familiar with the scene and import of the Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth, I choose instead to look at the writing from the minor prophet, Micah. In this selection, Micah addresses Bethlehem-Ephrathah, the place of origin of the dynasty of David and therefore of the future heir to be expected from David's line, a messianic king who would rule over Israel again. Listen to the prophet's words:

From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel. He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock by the strength of the Holy One. His greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; HE SHALL BE PEACE.

As we read this today, we easily reflect and see the foretelling of Jesus. Micah had no such knowledge. This is a connection that we see in retrospect. Micah's original message was to people who desperately needed a king like David to save them from impending doom. The Assyrians were knocking at their door with every intent to conquer, control and exile. Micah tells the terrified people of the time that there would be a leader and deliverer who would save the nation of Israel. Micah did not know when the deliverer would come. Micah had no idea that the messiah would be Jesus.

So, Micah's prophecy was not to be witnessed in his peoples' time. In 722 BC, the kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians. Young able-bodied men were taken into exile and alien people were brought into Israel. Intermarriage would result from this, making the conquered Israelites easier to control. This tactical maneuver would reverberate for centuries as the later Samaritans were depreciated by the full-blooded Jews of Judah.

It was the passage of time that caused the message of Micah to be seen as hope for the distant future. Matthew, who even quotes this from Micah, and the early Christians could see within Micah the promise of one who would not only deliver them but would also be the peace for which mankind longed.

Are you concerned that perhaps Micah's failure to know the future lessens his message? Remember that a prophet is not one who knows and foretells the future. A prophet speaks the message of God to the people. Micah's words were words of hope and promise to people walled in by trouble and danger. Are we so different today? The only deliverance for us is to place our hope in the Promise.