

Micah 5:2-5a

2 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. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. 4 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; 5 and he shall be the one of peace.

Ready or not here it comes, this is the 4th Sunday of Advent already and Christmas will be here this Saturday as we celebrate the birth of the Lord. The birth narrative found in the Gospel of Matthew has the wise men going to Jerusalem asking people “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?” The wise men were expecting royalty; they brought royal gifts for the new king, they went to the capitol, and they were expecting a royal welcome. King Herod hears about them looking for the king of the Jews, but he is ignorant of the scriptures, and does not know the messianic prophecy. So, he has to ask the chief priests and the scribes where it is that the Messiah is to be born. The answer is Bethlehem.

Today’s Scripture is the prophecy that the religious leaders referred to. They knew the prophecy and they knew that foreigners were looking for him in order to pay their respects. So, the religious leaders knew that this is the Messiah. The wise men went to Bethlehem looking for him. The king and the religious leaders did not go. Why they did not go is due to their attitudes. The religious leaders should have been devoted, and they should have been excited, but they did nothing. The wise men are called wise for a reason. They are Gentiles and the scriptures teach us that it is the outsiders that recognize and appreciate what God has done. The birth narratives of the Bible show the contrast of attitudes between the special few that are devoted (Mary, wise men, shepherds) and the religious institution.

In the Bible there is a lesson of tremendous irony. The religious institution was in the know all along - ever since the birth of Jesus. People also knew from the prophecy of Micah that this would be the one of Peace. They had the scrolls, they had the knowledge about King David, and they had the prophecy of Micah. The irony is that their expectations of the Messiah were that he would be a great warrior king but they ignored the actual lessons of the Bible. You see, David was unable to build the temple due to bloodshed, “you shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood” (1st Chronicles 22:8). David had to forfeit the greatest honor because David was one of bloodshed not one of peace. The irony of it all is that the people failed to recognize the heart and soul of God. They claimed their religion without actually knowing God. They did not appreciate the value God placed on peace and humility. The people wanted the Messiah but they did not want the one of peace. They wanted their own version of the Messiah, the Messiah of human expectations, not the Messiah of God’s heart. God appreciates and honors peace. God’s Messiah is the One of Peace. The prophecy of Micah is the One of Peace. What people should have been expecting, looking for, and hoping for, is the One of Peace.

The contrasting attitudes of the people in the Bible aren't just restricted to them; the same contrasting attitudes exist within people today. Very few are devoted; worship God, pray regularly, study the Bible, and care for the underprivileged. Our world is a world of hypocrisy that claims to be religious but does not know the Spirit of God. When you truly realize what the Lord has done for us, it hits the heart. I hope you take the time to reflect on just how great the gift truly is. I encourage you to realize and appreciate the extent of the love that has gone into this gift and the sacrifice that was made for us.

For reality to sink in, sometimes it has to get through hardened hearts and hard heads. I will always remember the time when my attitude towards dad changed. We were mostly neglected; our dad did not play with us or take us places to do things with us. But there was this time when my brother Paul and I got bicycles for our birthdays. It was years later, after I had become an adult, that my mother told me the story of how my dad built those bicycles. He had a friend with shop and they got together after work for several days and made these bicycles. He couldn't afford to buy them, so he made them and gave them to us on our birthday. That was a big - oh wow - moment for me in my life. I realized the extent of my father's love when I was able to see him from another perspective and realize the sacrifice that was made for me. I told my brother the story and he had a totally different attitude. He denied it and as a consequence, he never developed an attitude of appreciation like I did.

The world is full of people that have never developed an attitude of appreciation to God. Think about this coming Christmas day and the difference between celebrating Christmas and celebrating the birth of the Lord. The world takes this gift for granted and even atheists celebrate Christmas. As you celebrate Christmas, I hope you take the time to appreciate what Christmas is all about - the baby Jesus, the Advent of Christ, God's gift of love, and sacrifice. The value of God's gift is significant because it is a gift of sacrifice. When you truly realize what God sacrificed for us, then you can't help but appreciate it and live a dedicated life. We owe tremendous thanks to God for bringing us the One of Peace.