

St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church
Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz
Christmas 2 January 4, 2009
Micah 5:2-5a



But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

I, too, love superheroes! The fact is – ever since 9/11 people – every day people have more and more – done the work of superheroes! They have put on costumes and fought against evil in their own communities. There is in fact a world registry of over 200 super heroes. Did you know that? People like the Green Scorpion. He wears a cape and a scary mask and a big hat. He is part of the Justice Society of Justice. Sound redundant? It's supposed to. The Justice Society of Justice is – twice the justice – get it? The Green Scorpion says, "I'm here to chew gum and pound bad guys and I'm all out of gum!" There's the Geist – which is of course German for *Spirit*. He's on patrol in Rochester, MN. His mission is the help the homeless, the forgotten – those overlooked by mainstream people. He too is dressed in green – wears sun glasses and a mask and is ready to make Citizen's arrests! Sounds like Gomer Pyle – after Barney Fife – for making an illegal u-turn doesn't it? There's a superhero in New York who is saving up money so he can go to a far away place like Darfur or Iraq or Afghanistan – to try to save *innocent* people! This is in sharp contrast to the Christ-child who came to rescue the guilty. The Christ-child was born to rescue people guilty of unspeakable evil and horrible hurtful sins – very often done on purpose again and again. We are repeat offenders – hardened sinners – aren't we? Jesus was born to pay for the sins of serial killers – those who have done unspeakable harm to small children. Jesus came to die on the cross for the worst sinners of all – for me and for you. Jesus came to save us from sins for which we deserve the eternal horrors of hell. Jesus came to save you and me!

This first Sunday of a new year – we thank and praise God:

Jesus Is Our Newborn King!

- 1. Jesus is ruler over all**
- 2. Jesus is our forever peace.**

Context is always important. The context for the scroll of the prophet Micah is probably not well known. You only hear a reading from the prophet Micah once a year – two out of every three years. You hear the *Bethlehem, Ephrathah* verse recited each Christmas Eve. And that's about it. So chances are pretty good that it's seldom you have heard a sermon from Micah other than Christmas Eve. Micah preached God's Word during the reigns of **Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah**. It says that in Micah chapter one verse one. **Jotham**. **Jotham** was in fact in charge during the last years of his father Uzziah's reign. Do you remember Uzziah? Uzziah was a very powerful King. God's Word says, "**But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his**

downfall. He was unfaithful to the LORD his God, and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah the priest with 80 other courageous priests of the LORD followed him in. They confronted him and said, "It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the LORD God." Uzziah who had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense, became angry. While he was raging at the priests in their presence before the incense altar in the LORD's temple, leprosy broke out on his forehead. When Azariah the chief priest and all the other priests looked at him, they saw that he had leprosy on his forehead, so they hurried him out. Indeed he himself was eager to leave, because the LORD had afflicted him. Kung Uzziah had leprosy until the day he died. He lived in a separate house – leprous, and excluded from the temple of the LORD. Jotham his son had charge of the palace and governed the people of the land. 2 Chronicles 26:16-22 Would you learn from your father's tragic mistakes? Jotham, by the grace of God – did! **Jotham rebuilt the upper gate of the temple of the LORD and did extensive work on the wall at the hill of Ophel. He built towns in the Judean hills and forts and towers in the wooded areas.** Jotham understood his role – as shepherd of God's people – it was essential to keep them safe from their enemies. God's Word says, **Jotham made war on the Ammonites and conquered them.** The Ammonites were guilty of the most filthy fertility cult worship. Thus they were not just a military and political danger to God's people. They were a spiritual threat – to the faith and immortal souls of God's people. God's Word says, "**Jotham grew powerful because he walked steadfastly before the LORD his God.**" By grace alone the LORD kept his people faithful. By grace alone the LORD blessed his people. Jotham became king when he was only 25 years old. He ruled for just 16 years – like 4 of our presidential terms – and at the age of 41 **rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. And Ahaz his son succeeded him as king.**

Ahaz – Jotham's son was just 20 years old when he became king. Would you be ready to be King – when you were 20? Ahaz would rule for 16 years, too. But the sad truth is – Ahaz was not faithful like his father. God's Word says Ahaz made cast idols for worshiping the Baals. He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his sons in the fire. Wait a minute! Are we saying the King of God's people actually threw his infant sons into literal flames – burning them to death – to worship false gods of fertility – gods of earthly riches – "things and stuff"? Before we become all indignant – pounding the pulpit with all sorts of righteous indignation – it has been estimate there are 182 abortions in these United States of America every hour! That works out to 3 per minute or one every 20 seconds – day in and day out – day after day. If you do the math – that means more lives are being lost every 17 hours – than were lost on 9/11! It's hard to imagine that many little broken bodies – that many lives lost. And how often do we think about it? **Ahaz followed the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree!** How horrible was that? And yet – again – the wickedness of God's people – cannot – simply cannot spoil the goodness of God.

Ahaz and God's people were in danger from powerful military enemies. Humanly speaking there was every reason to be afraid. But the LORD sent Isaiah and his son Shear-Jashub and said, "**Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood – because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aman and of the son of Remaliah.'**" The LORD would keep them safe. And if there was any doubt in his heart – Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, "**Ask the LORD your God for assign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.**" But Ahaz said, "**I will not ask; I will**

not put the LORD to the test." Sounds good – doesn't it? But it wasn't. The LORD knew it – and Isaiah knew it, too. **Then Isaiah said, "Hear now, you house of David. Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and you will call him Immanuel."** You know what that means – *Immanuel* – **God with us!** That's what Jesus is – God with us – one of us – to save us!

Jotham and Ahaz and Good King Hezekiah – were kings when Micah – like Isaiah and Hosea preached law and Gospel to God's people! **But you Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times. Bethlehem.** There was more than one Bethlehem – just like there are lots of Watertowns – Watertown South Dakota, New York, Tennessee and more. There was a Bethlehem in the north in the land of Zebulun. But the Bethlehem where Jesus would be born was also called Ephrathah – where King David was born – where Jacob's sweetest love Rachel was buried. This little village – some 6 miles south of Jerusalem – like Johnson Creek south of Watertown – would be the place where the Messiah – the promised and anointed one would be born. When wicked paranoid murderous King Herod heard from the Wisemen from the East – that a new King had been born – he immediately inquired of the Chief Priests and teachers of the law where the Christ was to be born. Quickly they told him in Bethlehem. The little town of Bethlehem – is still little even today. How typical of our Heavenly Father to pick a small and out of the way place for His Son to be born. The Apostle Paul talked about how our Father does things when he wrote to the Greeks in Corinth: **"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."** 1 Corinthians 1:27,28 The King of kings was not born in Jerusalem or Rome or Athens or Cairo. He was born in Bethlehem to be worshiped by shepherds who knelt before him.

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace. The Hebrew word for peace is shalom. It is already a couple of years ago – that my Hebrew professor was in the hospital. It's always kind of a debate – when someone you love is dying. Do you want to see them – with all the tubes and wires – being sad and in pain? Or do you want to remember them the way you saw them last – when they were well and strong and happy? I would never judge anyone else. You need to do what you think is best in your heart. I went back and forth a whole bunch of times. Then I decided I was going to go and visit my friend. And we had a wonderful talk and I said a prayer with him – for him. And then I said God bless you and I love you and good-bye. And I was just about to the doorway when my Hebrew professor said, "Shalom!" And I said, "Shalom!" back to him. That's the last word he ever said to me – shalom. One of the most simple, powerful, profound words in the whole Old Testament. It's peace – with the Great I AM – peace with the Holy One of Israel! It means all my sins are forgiven. The One who rained down fire and brimstone on Sodom and Gomorrah – who one time and one time only sent a flood to practically wipe life from this planet. The One who has literally opened up the earth to swallow up sinners – and struck them dead on the spot – is not angry with me – for Jesus' sake. Peace – of heart and mind and conscience. I can face a whole new year – unafraid! God's Word is true for you and for me. **Don't be anxious about anything – but in everything by prayer and**

petition with thanksgiving – present your requests to God. And the peace of God – which surpasses all understanding – will keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus!

Superheroes! There's a superhero in Canada who calls himself Polar Man. He wears a helmet with a little miner's light on it. He carries a snow shovel. He shovels sidewalks and steps for the elderly. He is inspired by a legendary Inuit man who used to give food and clothing to people in need. There is another superhero – who literally heard screaming in his neighborhood – someone in terrible distress. But by the time he put his tights and cape on – the police were already there. And when he tried to disappear – to simply vanish or fly away – he found that he couldn't! So it goes with earthly human superhero wannabes! We don't need tights or capes or some really cool symbol on our chest. We don't need powerful arms or bullets to bounce off of us. What we need is a heart of faith – filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. Then we will be strong against the ultimate forces of darkness and evil. We will be strong against the devil and all his evil angels. When Jesus' forgiving love overflows your heart – you will very quietly and cheerfully love and forgive one-another. Then we will do what the prophet Micah said the LORD expects of us. We will **love justice and show mercy and walk humbly with our God. Amen!**