

Sermon Notes – December 22, 2024
Fourth Sunday of Advent
The Holy Gospel of St. Luke 1: 39-55
Peace Lutheran Church
“The Cradle and Cross”

We do not need to read the prophecy of Micah in a christological light (that pertaining to the life of Jesus) in order to hear the good news. The people of Bethlehem are suffering the effects of bad rulers, menacing nations that threaten the borders of Judah and especially Jerusalem, and the effects of economics that have deprived the people of land, food, and adequate wages. Into this sorry state comes the word of the Lord that the conclusion will be peace. Out of the little town of Bethlehem will come a savior.

This littleness is in keeping with the promise that weakness is strength, that dying brings rising, that suffering will not last forever. A ruler is coming to bring relief to the poor by beating swords into plowshares (4: 3). We can enter into the welcome prospect of this hopeful promise, since in our own time many people in our world await deliverance, and we can see how support from those who give of what they have to ease the struggles - however small these gifts might be - means radical changes for the better.

The powerful, prophetic word from Micah is coupled with Mary's visit to Elizabeth. Two pregnant women who love each other become the location of the Lord's greatness, just as little Bethlehem will become the location of the ruler who will bring peace. Note that Elizabeth does not proclaim her joy over the fact of their pregnancies, but over her receiving a visit from “the mother of my Lord” (Luke 1: 43). The story has Elizabeth pointing to the fruit of Mary's willing submission to the Spirit having entered into her very being. 'This is the image of God's gift to all of us, and especially to those in our world who are the little ones (metaphorically), those who are ignored and believe themselves to be of little worth. While Mary's song

celebrates God's gift, it is also a necessary message in a world that continually militates against that which is deemed small and meek.

Elizabeth's first question is important: "Why has this happened to me?" (Luke 1: 43). This question is asked by many people whose suffering is inexplicable - but it is also asked by people to whom goodness has come. Elizabeth speaks a blessing on the one who believes what the Lord has spoken. This could also be a blessing on little Bethlehem and on other places where people who are shattered find the strength to regain hope.

All people have something for which to hope. Consider whether the prospect of hope itself is a blessing. Hmmmm!