

**+ Micah 5:2-5a + Images of a Coming Savior: The Shepherd-King +  
+ 4th Sunday in Advent + 23 December 2012 +**

If I were to go around the room and ask you to share with me your favorite picture of Jesus from Holy Scripture, apart from the picture of Christ crucified, I would guess that most of you would say Jesus as the Good Shepherd. There's something about that picture of the Good Shepherd holding a lamb in his arms or on his shoulders that brings comfort and reassurance to young and old alike. That picture of Jesus calms frightened, hurting, and dying souls. It's no wonder that Christians have depicted Jesus as the Good Shepherd for centuries in paintings and stained glass windows and sculptures and even rough drawings on ancient Roman walls.

It's one of the most familiar and most beloved images of the Savior from Holy Scripture, but to be honest, it's not an image that usually comes to mind during these Advent days before Christmas. We don't typically have a "Good Shepherd Sunday" during Advent like we do during the Easter season in the spring. This time of year if we think of shepherds, it's usually those men who first received the good news of the Savior's birth from the mouths of angels, who worshiped at his manger-bed, and then became the first Gospel proclaimers taking the good news to Bethlehem.

This morning, however, the Lord has one more image of the coming Savior for you and me to consider. This one is very familiar. At the same time, it also provides something you desperately need during these last crazy days of Advent—something more than what you can get from gentle snow, twinkly lights, family traditions, or jingly Christmas tunes. So take a closer look at one last image of the coming Savior and see there **THE SHEPHERD-KING**.

Things weren't going so well in the southern kingdom of Judah. The Lord had allowed the vicious Assyrian empire to wipe out their relatives to the north and march all the way up to the gates of Jerusalem. Judgment had come for the northern kingdom after centuries of rejection and idolatry and immorality. Eventually judgment and destruction would also come for Judah, but the Lord had intervened and rescued the Jews. God sent his prophet Micah to warn the people away from their wickedness and hypocritical lip service to the Lord, but for those who remained faithful to him, the Lord had a promise—a Shepherd-King would finally bring peace.

Even back in the Old Testament this was a familiar and beloved picture. Archaeology has shown that even pagan rulers wanted to be perceived as "shepherd-kings", but for God's Old Testament people, the golden age of Israel was under the reign of THE shepherd-king—David.

A thousand years before the birth of Christ, David was the youngest of his father Jesse's sons and the shepherd of his father's flocks. He lived in a little, insignificant punkin' junction called Bethlehem. Yes, Bethlehem was not far from the capital city of Jerusalem, but David might as well have been in the middle of nowhere. Calling Bethlehem "O Little Town of Bethlehem" would've been generous. It wasn't an important capital city. It wasn't a bustling metropolis. It wasn't the center of anything, but the Lord in his grace made it important. From so many, the Lord in his grace chose David of all people to become Israel's king, and what a king he was!

David shepherded his people as he had shepherded his flocks. The Lord blessed his reign with military victories, great wealth, a unified and expanding kingdom, and a mighty capital city called Jerusalem, but yet this shepherd-king wasn't perfect. In fact, at times David proved to be less than faithful as he shepherded his people. Although God considered him "**after his own heart**" as his follower, David was still a sinful human being who at times sacrificed his sheep for his own sake or took advantage of them because he was king. That sinful disobedience passed to the next generation and the next, and quickly turned into rebellion and wickedness against the Lord. With only a couple exceptions, David's descendants failed time and again to be shepherd-kings like their forefather.

With Judah on the brink of destruction and Micah sounding the warning, God's faithful people were nearly without hope, that is, until God promised a true Shepherd-King. "**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.**" Yes, another Shepherd-King would come from insignificant, little Bethlehem, just like David, but it wouldn't be David.

Unlike David, who came from a long family line of sinners, of disobedience and rebellion against God, of foolish decisions and broken promises, the King to come had a different family line. His "**origins are from of**

**old, from ancient times**". He is without beginning—the eternal Son of God, as we confess in the Nicene Creed, **"eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made."** Being true God, the Shepherd-King would be holy and free from sin, not bearing the sinful curse that David had inherited from his ancestors before him and had sadly passed on to his descendants after him.

As true God, this Shepherd-King had been around for eternity, but at just the right time, he would be born of a human mother in a very real earthly place. In fact, his birth would usher in a time when the holy God would restore humanity who had rebelled against him. **"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."** One of Micah's contemporaries named Isaiah had been the Lord's mouthpiece for another promise about this Shepherd-King. **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel** (which means "God with us")." (Isaiah 7:14) This was the birth to which Micah referred—a royal child would be born of a virgin mother at just the right time to restore the Lord's kingdom of grace for sinners like you and me.

Now what exactly is this Shepherd-King going to do? **"He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God."** Like I said earlier, this time of year we don't normally think of Jesus as shepherd. We think of the shepherds from the Gospel account of Jesus' birth. We don't think of the Good Shepherd embracing a lamb with his nail-pierced hands, calming her fears and caring for her every need, or the Good Shepherd protecting his sheep even to the point of sacrificing his own life, or the Good Shepherd leading his sheep to green pastures and cool waters even while protecting them as they go through the dark valleys of death and fear.

...But that is the image of the coming Savior we see before us on this last day of Advent. He stands and nothing can move him, because he is the almighty God. He guides his flock—his faithful followers—with a strength found nowhere else—a strength that can withstand worry and fear and doubt, hurricanes and blizzards, fiscal cliffs and unspeakable tragedies. With this strength, he defends you not only from the temptations of Satan and the attacks of your sinful nature, but also from the sinful world's onslaught against his people. Though wolves may try to attack you, they cannot and will not overcome the Shepherd-King, who protects his flock to the end. By his saving name, he overcomes the world and rescues you. Unlike David, he never sacrifices his sheep for his own sake or takes advantage of you, but instead sacrifices himself to bring you to the safety of heaven. By that sacrifice, he brings eternal majesty to his holy name because he saves you.

Micah describes what this Shepherd-King provides for his flock of faithful followers. **"And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace."** As the Good Shepherd he knows you by name, gives his life for you, and tenderly cares for every one of you, young and old. What the Lord promises is not a world that might be better, but a life in which you really have nothing to fear. The Shepherd-King provides you something the world cannot give—real security. Not that fearsome things won't come into your life on this side of heaven, but in this Shepherd-King, you can have a confidence that is unshakable. With his almighty power, he defends you, and by his grace, he provides for you.

**"His greatness will reach to the ends of the earth...and he will be their peace."** This King comes to bring you fulfillment, to bring you complete unity, perfect harmony, and peace with your heavenly Father. This was accomplished when our Shepherd-King sacrificed himself on the cross. Now there is peace for your guilty conscience. There is peace in this vale of tears and peace in the hour of death. Peace through Jesus gives certainty when you're faced with tragedy and hardship, difficulty and trial and woe. That peace even shows itself in how you interact with loved ones and co-workers and neighbors and friends and classmates. It's no wonder the angels sang that first Christmas night, **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."** (Luke 2:14) Peace truly came to earth through Jesus—the embodiment of God's love, the fulfillment of his promises, the Shepherd-King sent by God himself for you and me.

That image of Jesus is so beautiful, so comforting, and yes, so appropriate for this time of year. Because the Shepherd-King of ancient origin did come as promised from that insignificant village of Bethlehem, you can rest securely. Amidst the chaos of the world around you as it spirals further and faster towards Christ's final judgment on the Last Day, you have peace in the Shepherd-King, whose boundless love and almighty protection for you can never be shaken. The time has come for us to travel to Bethlehem to worship this Shepherd-King—the LORD Our Righteousness, the Messenger of the covenant, the Lord with you, the Shepherd-King who is your peace. Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth! Amen.