

Fourth Sunday of Advent-Year C- The Rev. Canon Joan Anthony-12.19.21
Micah 5:2-5a, Psalm 80:1-7, Hebrews 10: 5-10, Luke 3: 7-18

Today I have no contemporary story to tell. Instead we begin to hear again the story of the promise of God to a weary world. We begin with the prophet Micah, eight centuries before Jesus.

Historians tell us that in the days of the prophet Micah, many in Judah suffered displacement and economic hardship. Assyria was threatening to invade the kingdom and the rulers of Judah paid tribute for several generations to remain independent. The expense of this tribute was passed on to the poor. Taxes were high and there was corruption throughout the land. In addition, refugees flooded into Jerusalem and rest of the southern kingdom from the north. Resources were not plentiful, the increased population and need for more food encouraged inflation. The people longed for a better world, for peace and security, longed for leaders who would fulfill God's promises of prosperity and plenty for everyone. There was not 'peace on earth, goodwill to all'. The world was not as it should be--not as God intended it to be. There are many similarities between that world and ours.

Micah begins to speak to the people of Judah saying that God does not accept this state of affairs and will send a leader to set things right. This leader will come from a surprising place and rule in an astonishing way. Micah was convinced that God would act on behalf of those who are unjustly subjugated, exploited, and demoralized.

Micah brought an amazing message; an astonishing vision of what God would do. The promise of God would not be fulfilled in the seats of power, but in a small hill town, insignificant except for the fact that it was the birthplace of Israel's great King, David. It would come not from a powerful warrior but from a baby born in poverty in a stable. The promise would not come through a powerful and wealthy family but through a child born to a teenager, who was a virgin and as yet unmarried. The promise of God that Micah saw would not come in the ways that human beings thought of as splendid or appropriate, but in a way that were outright scandalous. In the words of a contemporary theologian, "Micah's people saw so much greed and deception in high places. Could they believe that the 'one of peace,' whose only weapon is gentleness, would win for them security and safety, when they experienced so much violence around them? Could they believe that someone from little, out-of-the-way Bethlehem would be 'great to the ends of the earth'? Can we?

Therein lies our choice the choice of hope and the actions to create a better world. Or the choice of despair and anxiety. Because even all these centuries later, the world is still not as it should be--not as God intended it to be. Where will the promise of God be fulfilled in our day, if not through people of faith, people just like you and like me?

This Advent as in all those Advent seasons that have been before, we wait and prepare for the birth once again of Jesus into our hearts. But the truth is that Jesus has never left us. God's promise was fulfilled in Mary because she had the faith and courage to believe in the promise of God to her. And for this she was blessed. Jesus was born of Mary and God became human and dwelt among us. God continues to dwell among those who are willing to allow the Christ child to be born in them each day. It is said that "Christ must be born from every soul, formed in every life." That is how the promise of God continues to be fulfilled in the world. When the Angel Gabriel spoke to Mary, he ended with the proclamation and promise that

nothing was impossible with God. Mary immediately responded, "Here am I, servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."

In the days ahead in the year of our Lord 2022, we too will be blessed, but it will take the courage and faith to believe in the promise of God to us. Our challenge is to respond as did Mary. Here we are, servants of the Lord, let it be with us according to God's word.