

January 4, 2015
Christmas 2

“Secure in the Love of Your Shepherd”

MICAH 5:2-5

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. ³ 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. ⁴ 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. ⁵ And he will be their peace.

What a shock it must have been for the wise men to discover that Jesus was not born in the well known city of Jerusalem as they expected when the star first appeared to them. Instead Old Testament scholars in Jerusalem told them the prophet Micah predicted the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. The star that first appeared to them led them to the very house where they found Mary and Joseph and the baby Jesus. Without hesitation or shame they worshiped this child as their Lord and God and Savior.

As we enter into a new year we are not ashamed of what we did this past Christmas. With our eyes of faith we joined the wise men and the shepherds in worshipping the baby Jesus as our Lord and God and Savior. As we look ahead to a new year with eyes of faith we believe that Jesus our Lord and God will take care of us and provide for us the way a shepherd cares for his sheep. Let's take a closer look at these words from the prophet Micah, especially verses 4 and 5. These words assure us that we are secure in the love of our Shepherd whatever the future brings.

Your Shepherd feeds you

Your loving shepherd will do whatever it takes to feed you in his Word in the year which lies before us. Verse 4 says, "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." Notice it says that he stands and shepherd his flock. He does not sit down and relax or take time off from his job. He is there 24/7 always leading you into new places where he will bless you with his Word and his love for you.

On the family farm we fed the cows by opening up bales of hay and placing the hay in front of them so they could produce lots of good milk. When the Bible uses the image of a shepherd to describe our Savior's love for us we need to think of a shepherd feeding the sheep by carefully selecting pastures where the sheep can find grass that will be healthy for them. The 23rd Psalm says of the Lord "He makes me lie down green pastures and lead me beside cool waters."

The prophet Micah tells us that the Messiah who was to be born in Bethlehem will shepherd his flock "in the strength of the Lord." In John 10 Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice,

and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." But then Jesus goes on to say, "My Father who has given them to me is greater than all, no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I am the Father are one."

What strength we see in Jesus as he takes care of us throughout this coming year. He is equal to our heavenly Father in power. He and the heavenly Father are one. The prophet Micah said that the child born in Bethlehem is one who will rule over Israel "whose origin are from of old, from ancient times." We think of the words of John 1 that tell us about Jesus, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Jesus, Lord and God from all eternity, risen from the dead and sitting at the right hand of God, is carefully micromanaging your life as he plans out all the pastures where he will feed you in his Word and his love for you.

In his book, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Philip Keller writes, "Green pastures are essential for success with sheep. When lambs are maturing and the ewes need green succulent feed for heavy milk flow, there is no substitute for good pasture. No sight so satisfies the sheep owner as to see his flock well and quietly fed to repletion on rich forage, able to lie down and rest, ruminate and gain." The 23rd Psalm says, "He makes me to lie down in green pastures..." When the sheep lie down, they are full. As they rest they are convert the rich grasses into food for every cell in their body.

As we look out into a new year, we think of Jesus as our loving Shepherd taking us into his Word, opening up verses of the Bible to us and helping us put them into our memory. We see him sending the Holy Spirit to us and helping us remember the things he has taught us in his Word. How many times did the shepherd lead you this past year into green pastures, and then lead you to sit down and carefully ruminate on the words that he gave you? We once had a prayer we used to close our worship that had these words about reading the Bible, "Grant that we might read, mark and inwardly digest them."

Your Shepherd protects you

The Shepherd who feeds you also watches over you and protects you. "And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth." The Hebrew word used here for living securely has the thought of people living in a permanent place. The 23rd Psalm speaks of security with such words as "your rod and staff they comfort me" and "goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." This little town of Bethlehem offers you a child who is Lord and God from all eternity who will keep you safe and secure in his love for you.

We think of the words of Psalm 27 that say, "The Lord is my light and my salvation-whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life- of whom shall I be afraid?" This wonderful psalm goes on to say, "For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me on a high rock."

You lock your home when you leave. You lock your car when park it in a parking lot to go shopping. We fear that someone might break into our home or break into our car. We have sheriffs and police officers who patrol our streets at night to keep us safe. Our

greatest danger we face every day is that of temptation. In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Lead us not into temptation." With these words we ask the Lord to help us fight against Satan and the evils that surround us in the world in which we live.

How would you feel if a violent criminal was released from prison and he rented the house next door to you? Satan is not just living next door. He is right there with us in our homes and in our cars and in our offices and always putting evil thoughts into our hearts. We think of the great words of Martin Luther's hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." "Tho' devils all the world should fill. All eager to devour us. We tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not over power us. This world's prince may still. Scowl fierce as he will. He can harm us none. He's judged the dead is done. One little world can fell him."

Jesus is able to protect you from the assaults of Satan because his power reaches to the ends of the earth. "And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth." The baby born in Bethlehem is Christ the Lord. Romans 8 assures us of the security we have in him. "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." That is the ultimate security for new year.

Your Shepherd is your peace

Your Shepherd born in Bethlehem feeds you. Your Shepherd born in Bethlehem protects you. Your Shepherd born in Bethlehem is your peace.

Our text says of Jesus our Shepherd, born in Bethlehem, and God from all eternity. "He will be their peace." Notice it does not say, "He will give us peace, or he will show us peace, or he will lead us to peace." It simply says, "He will be their peace."

I can find some resources within myself to live more peacefully with other people. But I cannot find the resources within myself to gain peace with God. That is only available for me in Jesus. "He will be their peace." As Paul wrote in Ephesians, "He himself is our peace." I keep thinking of the words from Isaiah 59 that were part of our Christmas Eve Service. How desperately we need Jesus to be our peace. "We look for light, but all is darkness, for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes. At midday we stumble as if it were twilight... For our offences are many in your sight, and our sins testify against us."

The Child born in Bethlehem is our peace. As we sing in the Christmas hymn; "Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled." Isaiah 53 assures us of this peace that is ours in Jesus that we cannot find in ourselves or any other religion in the world. "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities: the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." Romans 5 says, "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and access into the grace in which we stand." Every day, because Jesus is my peace, I can go directly to my Father in prayer without any hesitation. What peace this brings. If this is our last year on this earth we can die in peace, safe in the life Jesus lived for us and the death he died for us, having full access to our God and to the place he has prepared

for us.

What a wonderful blessing you have for the New Year as you listen again to these words from the Old Testament prophet Micah about the Child born in Bethlehem: "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." Amen