



*But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.*

*<sup>3</sup>Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labour has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.*

*<sup>4</sup>And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth;*

*<sup>5</sup>and he shall be the one of peace.*

Micah 5:2–5<sup>a</sup>

Merry Christmas! This e-newsletter is going to be delivered during one of the busiest weekends of the year, so who knows when you are going to read it. Perhaps it is Christmas evening or maybe the morning of Boxing Day, just before you get ready to drive to worship. Or maybe you will watch the live stream or find time the week between Christmas and January 1<sup>st</sup>. I do hope the message and meaning of Christmas has once again captured your spirit and inspired you to expect great things from God and attempt great things for God in 2022.

The text for this Sunday reminds me of Matthew's telling of the Christmas story. You will remember that Luke tells us about the taxation ordered by the emperor, the trip to Bethlehem to be registered, the birth in what was likely a cave and then the visit by the shepherds who heard about the promised child from an angel choir. Matthew's story features the visit of the magi or wise men who say they have seen a star that heralded the birth of one born king of the Jews.

There is a part of this story that has always been something of a puzzle to me. The magi come to Jerusalem, to the current king, Herod, in order to ask about the child. Herod knows nothing about any child that might threaten his rule so he asks the Temple authorities where the Messiah was to be born. The answer is to quote the prophet Micah who said this birth would

happen in Bethlehem. The magi get sent off to Bethlehem; it's not a long trip, about 10 kilometres. Does it surprise you that none of Jerusalem's religious authorities decide to check out the story? Even if Herod managed to keep the visit of the magi a secret, you would think him asking about the prophesied birthplace of the Messiah would have piqued someone's curiosity.

It seems no one from "headquarters" was interested enough to check. I wonder if this was the reason, that despite knowing in their heads what the prophecy said, in their hearts they had decided that nothing as important as the coming of Messiah could happen anywhere but in Jerusalem. After all Bethlehem, despite being the city of King David, was not an important place. I think they had come to doubt what scripture told them.

Timothy Keller talks about "the great reversal" that is central to the Christian faith. This is certainly seen in the cross and resurrection but it begins with the birth of Jesus. The one born to be king of the Jews sleeps in a manger, a feeding trough. The one who is God in the flesh does not come to be served but to serve. The one who is without sin is made to be sin so that we might become righteous in the sight of God—the great reversal.

Phillips Brooks was one of the great preachers of the nineteenth century in the United States where he was rector of Trinity Church, Boston. Today he is best known as the writer of the hymn O Little Town of Bethlehem, which he wrote during a trip to the Holy Land. Think about how God reverses life for our eternal good at Christmas—

How silently, how silently,  
The wondrous gift is given!  
So God imparts to human hearts  
The blessings of his heaven.  
No ear may hear his coming,  
But in this world of sin,  
Where meek souls will receive him still,  
The dear Christ enters in.

*Rev. Bill Norman*

## **ADVENT CANDLES AT HOME**

Time to put the candles away for this year, but not time to put the light away. As I write these words (on December 1) the news is full of reports about the Omicron variant of COVID-19 and what that might mean for us and for our world. 2021 has been a tough year and it may be that our hopes for a "normal" 2022 are not just around the corner. I hope I am wrong about that! No matter the news, this is what is true—the light of Christ is what is needed to bring light to darkness, hope to despair and life to death. God has given us what we need.

## **PRAYER FOR THIS WEEK**

Gracious and almighty God, accept our praise for the great gift of your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ, God with us, Immanuel. Bless us in the week ahead with time not only for relaxation but also for contemplating what it means for us to be citizens of your Kingdom and servants of King Jesus.

We pray in his name. Amen.