

Jerome Biblical Commentary on Advent 4 C

Reading 1

[Mi 5:1-4a](#)

Thus says the LORD:

You, Bethlehem-Ephrathah
too small to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel;
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient times.

Therefore the Lord will give them up, until the time
when she who is to give birth has borne,
and the rest of his kindred shall return
to the children of Israel.

He shall stand firm and shepherd his flock
by the strength of the LORD,
in the majestic name of the LORD, his God;
and they shall remain, for now his greatness
shall reach to the ends of the earth; he shall be peace.

The Promised Messiah (5:1-3). The Davidic ruler of Israel will rise from the district of Ephrathah. This king is not the present, but a future, monarch. The prophet is not saying that the Messiah will necessarily be born in Ephrathah, but that he will spring from the royal line of David. Jesse and David (1 Sm 17:12) came from Bethlehem. Bethlehem seems to be a gloss in the MT; it is lacking in the Gk text. Originally, the text probably read *bêt 'eprātāh*—i.e., “house of Ephrathah”—and Bethlehem would be an explanatory gloss on Ephrathah. Ephrathah is generally associated with Bethlehem. After the conquest of Canaan, Bethlehem was settled by the Ephrathah clan of the tribe of Judah. Therefore, Bethlehem is also called Ephrathah (Jos 15:59; Ru 4:11). Bethlehem, lit., “house of bread,” is located 5 mi. S of Jerusalem. In Mt 2:5-6, the midrashic interpretation of this text, it is shown how it was understood at the time of Jesus’ birth. This oracle fits in well with the theology of Micah and his contemporary, Isaiah; thus it is unnecessary to deny it to Micah.**1.** This optimistic verse stands in marked contrast to the preceding one. *me:* The speaker is Yahweh. *from ancient times:* From the ancient dynasty of David.**2.** Until the new king re-establishes the monarchy, Israel will be subject to other nations. The Israelites anxiously awaiting deliverance are likened to a woman in labor. There is an

MT Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)

Gk Greek

allusion to Is 7:14 in this verse—Micah has been influenced by the Emmanuel oracle.³ The qualities of the future monarch are delineated.

24 (F) Deliverance from Assyria (5:4-5). The people are the speakers in this passage. They are extremely confident of their ability to overcome Assyria. *shepherds...men of royal rank*: The leaders of the community. *seven...eight*: This numerical progression, also in Am, indicates an indefinite number.⁵ Nimrod was a legendary figure in the ancient Near East (cf. Gn 10:10ff.). Assyria is the “land of Nimrod”; the name is of uncertain origin. Its source may be the name of the Sumerian god of war and of the chase, Ninurta.

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¹Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19](#)

(4) Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

O shepherd of Israel, hearken,
from your throne upon the cherubim, shine forth.
Rouse your power,
and come to save us.

Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

Once again, O LORD of hosts,
look down from heaven, and see;
take care of this vine,
and protect what your right hand has planted
the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.

May your help be with the man of your right hand,
with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.

Then we will no more withdraw from you;

give us new life, and we will call upon your name. **Lord, make us turn to you; let us see your face and we shall be saved.**

Ps 80. A lament of the community. The occasion and date cannot be determined, despite the many theories that have been advanced; the indications in 2 have not yet been understood. The refrain (4, 8, 20) is oddly absent in 12 and 16. Structure: 2-4, a cry for help; 5-8, the present evils are contrasted with the past (9-12); 13-16, an appeal; 17-20, a wish and confident protestation of faithfulness. **1.** *shepherd*: Cf. Gn 48:15; 49:24; Ps 77:21. **2.** The mention of the northern tribes (except Benjamin!) suggests perhaps the troubles of 734-721 or the period of Josiah as the occasion of the prayer. Yahweh was conceived as invisibly enthroned “upon the cherubim,” the mythical winged figures, half-human and half-animal, associated with the Ark. **4.** *restore*: Does not necessarily presuppose the Exile; for the beneficent effects of the “face” of Yahweh, see Ps 31:17. **9.** *vine*: For the figure, see Hos 10:1; Is 5:1-7; Jer 2:2; Ez 17. The reference here is to the Exodus and Conquest. **11.** *cedars of God*: Giant trees that, like “mountains of God” (36:7) are God’s work, not man’s. **12.** *sea*: The Mediterranean. *river*: The Euphrates. **13.** The vines were usually protected by “walls” (Is 5:5) as a guard against humans or beasts. **15-16.** This touching plea is calculated to move God; the line bracketed in the CCD seems to be an accidental duplication of 18b. **18.** The prayer is for the king who sits at Yahweh’s “right hand” (Ps 110:1) and who here receives the unusual appellative, “son of man” (no relation to Dn 7).

2

CCD Contraternity of Christian Doctrine translation of the Bible

²Brown, R. E., Fitzmyer, J. A., & Murphy, R. E. 1968]; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996. *The Jerome Biblical commentary* (electronic ed.). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ

Reading II

[Heb 10:5-10](#)

Brothers and sisters:

When Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;
in holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight.
Then I said, ‘As is written of me in the scroll,
behold, I come to do your will, O God.’”

First he says, “Sacrifices and offerings,
holocausts and sin offerings,
you neither desired nor delighted in.”

These are offered according to the law.

Then he says, “Behold, I come to do your will.”

He takes away the first to establish the second.

By this “will,” we have been consecrated
through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

5-7. The words of Ps 40:7-9a are here attributed to the Son at his incarnation. The quotation follows the LXX in substance. In v. 7b of the Ps, the MT reads “ears you have dug for me” (to hear and obey God’s will). The majority of LXX mss. have the reading given in Heb: “you have prepared a body for me.” The meaning of the Ps is that God prefers obedience to sacrifice; it is not a repudiation of the ritual but a statement of its relative inferiority. Since Jesus’ obedience to God’s will was expressed by his willing offering of his body (i.e. himself) in death, the LXX reading of v. 7b is peculiarly applicable to him, so much so that it has been thought that the reading was introduced into the LXX under the influence of Heb (cf. J. Héring, *L’Épître aux Hébreux*, 95, n. 1). **8.** *sacrifices and offerings, holocausts and sin offerings you did not desire nor delight in—although the Law prescribes them:* These terms for sacrifice are probably meant to cover the four main types, i.e., peace offerings (“sacrifices”), cereal offerings (“offerings”), holocausts, and sin offerings. The last includes the guilt offerings (cf. Lv 5:6, 7, where the names of the two are interchanged, although the CCD does not make that clear). The phrase “although the Law prescribes them” prepares for the statement of v. 9 that the Law has been annulled in this respect. **9.** *then he says, Behold, I have come to do your will. He annuls the former in order to establish the latter:* God’s preferring obedience to sacrifice is interpreted as a repudiation of the OT sacrifices, and their replacement by the voluntary self-offering of Jesus. **10.** *it is by this will*

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

MT Masoretic Text (of the Hebrew Bible)

mss. Manuscripts

CCD Contraternity of Christian Doctrine translation of the Bible

OT Old Testament

that we have been consecrated: “This will” is the will of God, carried out by Christ, that he offer in death the body that God “prepared” for him. The offering of Jesus’ body means the same as the shedding of his blood; each expresses the total self-offering of Christ.

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Gospel

[Lk 1:39-45](#)

Mary set out
and traveled to the hill country in haste
to a town of Judah,
where she entered the house of Zechariah
and greeted Elizabeth.
When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting,
the infant leaped in her womb,
and Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit,
cried out in a loud voice and said,
"Blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb.
And how does this happen to me,
that the mother of my Lord should come to me?
For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears,
the infant in my womb leaped for joy.
Blessed are you who believed
that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled."

35 (c) THE VISITATION (1:39-56). Mary visits her kinswoman (the relation is very generally stated) to offer assistance and to seek advice.**39.** *with haste*: The Gk phrase (meta spoudēs) can also mean "very thoughtfully" (cf. B. Hospodar, *CBQ* 18 [1956] 14-18).**41.** *the babe leapt*: This action of Elizabeth's unborn child not only reminds us of Rebekah's children (Gn 25:22ff.) and David's dance before the Ark (2 Sm 6:16) but also of the messianic leap of joy among the poor (Is 35:6; Ps 114:6; Mal 3:20).**42.** *loud voice*: Another phrase redolent of messianic fulfillment (1 Chr 16:4-5; Ps 66:1; Is 40:9). *blessed are you...*: Many OT texts are echoed in this declaration of Elizabeth: Deborah's praise of Jael (Jgs 5:24); the people's acclaim of Judith (Jdt 13:18); the abundant blessings of Dt 7:12-14.

36 **46.** *and Mary said*: Mary's song of thanksgiving, often called the "Magnificat" (from the first word of the Vg translation), has been put together from many OT phrases (see the margins in A. Merk or E. Nestle; cf. J. T. Forestell, *Marian Studies* 12 [1961] 205-44). Such a heavy use of scriptural allusions has produced a ponderous piece of poetry with little originality or

Gk Greek

CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

OT Old Testament

Vg Vulgate (common Latin version of the Bible)

imagination. Yet it expresses deep emotion and strong conviction. Some mss. of the VL read here, “and Elizabeth said,” but the Gk mss. attribute the canticle to Mary. The similarity of the “Magnificat” to the canticle of Hannah (1 Sm 2:1-10) favors the attribution to Elizabeth: both Hannah and Elizabeth have been childless for a long period of their married life; both dedicated their child as a Nazirite; both bear a child who will “anoint” a future king. **47.** *my spirit rejoices:* Lit., “has rejoiced” (an aorist in Greek, to be explained by a Hebr original in which the preceding verb was a participle and this a wayyiqtol form continuing the same tense; this would ordinarily be translated by the past tense). **48-50.** The first stanza extols the fruits of faith and of lowly dependence on the merciful God. Luke has already cast Mary in the role of handmaid before God (1:38). So evident will be the transition God has achieved in Mary, of loneliness turned into fruitfulness, that all men will find hope. There is, therefore, a prophetic or eschatological ring to Mary’s words, strengthened by OT allusions such as Mal 3:12; Zech 3:7; Ps 111:9. God appears as the Mighty One; yet he exercises his power most of all in caring for the needy. **51-53.** The second stanza insists upon the great reversals of salvation history; one must be in need to be saved, one must be blind to be given light by God-as Dt-Is often sang (Is 40:29-31; 41:8-10, 17-20; 42:7; 57:15; 61:1-3). A series of aorists occur here (as also in 1 Sm 2:4f. [LXX] = pf. in the MT); these gnomic aorists point out how God is accustomed to act; he has always done it and will always continue to do it this way. *his arm:* This phrase has the nuance of OT redemption through battle (Ex 6:6; Dt 4:34; Jer 27:5; Is 40:10; 51:9). **54-55.** The conclusion gathers up the ideas of the Magnificat in the Servant theology of the OT and particularly of Dt-Is (Is 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). Jesus applied this theology to himself (3:22; 5:35; 9:22) and the very early Church thought of him in those same terms (Acts 3:13). **56.** Luke stylistically closes the scene; Mary must have remained longer, in order to be of service at the birth of John the Baptist. *about three months:* Possible allusion to the period of time in which the Ark remained in the house of Obed-edom (2 Sm 6:11); if so, the qualifying word “about” adapts the allusion to this new historical situation.

4

mss. Manuscripts

VL *Vetus latina* (pre-Vulgate Old Latin version of the Bible)

Hebr Hebrew

LXX Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT)

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