

IN EXCELSIS DEO

ADVENT 2024

Wednesday, December 25

Read: Malachi 5:2-5

Already. Not yet.

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.
Micah 5:2

The prophet Micah delivered his messages in a time of chaos and war. The northern kingdom, Israel, had been sacked by the power army of Assyria, and Judah would get the same treatment just over a century later. Writing about the conditions in his own world, he promised there would come a day when a shepherd-king would arise out of Bethlehem, one that would deliver peace. The peace he had in mind included calming the chaos and war in his world. About 700 years later, Christians re-read Micah's prophecy and understood it to have been fulfilled by Jesus. Of course, they would have to change some of Micah's expectations, for chaos and war are still alive and well.

Nevertheless, this is the hope we seek each and every Christmas, for one to calm the chaos and fears, to end the wars, to heal divisions, and to restore our faith. In seminary, we spoke about living in the "already/not yet." That is, Jesus has begun healing, but a healed world is not yet. Jesus was prophesied to calm the chaos and end the wars – some have been, but others not yet. Jesus preached, "Blessed are the poor;" but the eradication of poverty is not yet. This is why we keep celebrating Christmas, and then Easter, and then Christmas: because while we know it has happened, there is a real sense that fulfillment is not yet. Jesus did it . . . Jesus will do it. You see? It's the present we need help with.

And so, we will do this all over again next year, until the past and future meet in the present. That is the hope we raised each time we say or sing on this day, "Merry Christmas. Peace on earth. Goodwill to all."

Dr. Leonard Ezell