

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

## **The Fourth Sunday of Advent—Year C**

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Fr. Glenn Joseph Theoret  
Executive Director

[www.gratitudefoundation.us](http://www.gratitudefoundation.us)  
[frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us](mailto:frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us)

3713 County 416 20th Road  
Gladstone, MI 49837

*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# Fourth Sunday of Advent – Year C

## Reading I

### Micah 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.

## Responsorial Psalm

### Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19.

**R. (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.

**R. 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.

**R. 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.

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

## Reading II

### Hebrews 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.

## Alleluia

### Luke 1:38

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.

May it be done to me according to your word.

R. **Alleluia, alleluia.**

## Gospel

### Luke 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.”

# Exegesis

## Micah 5:1-4a

Micah was active during the reign of King Hezekiah who ruled from 740-687 B.C. “At this, some of the elders of the land came forward and said to all of the people assembled, Micah of Moresheth used to prophesy in the days of Hezekiah, king of Judah, and he told all the people of Judah: Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Zion shall become a plowed field, Jerusalem a heap of ruins, and the temple a mount of forest ridge.’ Did Hezekiah, king of Judah, and all Judah, condemn him to death? Did they not fear the Lord, so that he repented of the evil with which had threatened them?” (Jer 27: 18-19). The Prophet Jeremiah is quoting Micah a century later as Israel is experiencing the same infidelity and ultimately, they will endure a similar fate as they experienced 100 years prior, i.e., being overwhelmed by a foreign adversary.

Micah was a prophet from Moresheth of the rural countryside in south-west Judah. He was intensely aware of the rampant infidelity to Yahweh taking place during his time especially in the larger cities like Samaria and Jerusalem. He was particularly critical of religious and political leadership. Danger was not only external. Prophets, priests, and judges accepted bribes; merchants cheated; Canaanite cults were used alongside Yahwistic ones.<sup>1</sup> Samaria fell to the Assyrians in 722 and Jerusalem in 701. This is the setting for the prophesy of Micah.

Micah predicts a divine judgment on Israel and Judah because of their infidelity to Yahweh. He also foresees the hope and promise of a people restored by God. The beginning of Chapter 4 of *Micah* is titled *The New Israel – The People to be Restored*. Chapter 5 is titled *Restoration through the Messiah*. Our selected passage introduces this prophesy of the Messiah.

The messianic promise is to be fulfilled not in the metropolis of Jerusalem or in Samaria, but in the quiet little town of Bethlehem-Ephrathah. Bethlehem means *house of bread*, and Ephrathah means *fruitful*. Joshua 15:59 reveals that Bethlehem and Ephrathah are the same city identified by different names in different eras. It is the city of Jesse and of his son David, who was chosen to be king of the 12 tribes of Israel.<sup>2</sup>

Matthew interprets this text for us. “Assembling all the chief priests and the scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it has been written through the prophet: *And you, Bethlehem of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; since from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.*’” (Matt 2: 4-6).

*Whose origin is from of old, from ancient times.* This reveals the divinity of the coming Messiah, of his pre-existent being. This is a story of eternity stepping into time. In 1 Corinthians 10:12 St. Paul also reveals that the Rock in the desert that Moses struck during the Exodus was in fact Christ.

*He shall stand firm and shepherd His flock.* This is one of the earliest images of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. The metaphor of God shepherding His people come into vogue with the Prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel and would be confirmed by Jesus Himself in one of His great I AM statements, i.e., I AM the Good Shepherd.

*He shall be peace.* The Hebrew word for *peace* is *shalom*. The understanding of *shalom* is that God is the source of this state of being. This state is more than a lack of discord, it embodies a state of oneness and permanence amidst a world of chaos.

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1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.C.; Eng. Cliffs, N.J.; page 253.

2. Ibid.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Psalm 80:2-3, 15-16, 18-19.

Psalm 80 is titled *Prayer to Restore God's Vineyard*. It consists of 20 verses. The plea is for Yahweh the Shepherd to come and save the vine He has planted. The image of God as shepherd of the people was revealed by the Prophet Micah as he foretells of the birth of the Messiah. Through the Prophet Ezekiel God makes the promise, "For thus says the Lord God: I myself will look after and tend my sheep. As a shepherd tends his flock when he finds himself among his scattered sheep, so will I tend my sheep." (Ez 34: 11-12).

*Come to save us.* The Hebrew word that we translate as *save* is *yesua*. The Angel Gabriel tells Mary to name her child *yesua*, also translated *Jesus*, because he will save His people from their sins.

*Take care of this vine.* The image of God's children as a vine planted by Him is revealed through the Prophet Isaiah. "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His cherished plant." (Is 5:7). Psalm 80 verse 9 confirms this image: "You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove away the nations and planted it." This image is also revealed in Jer 2:21, Hos 10:1 and Matt 21:23. This image portrays God as a gardener who plants and cares for His vine.

*May your help be with the man of your right hand, with the son of man whom you yourself made strong.* The man of your right hand is the Davidic king who will lead the army in battle. The *son of man* is translated from the Hebrew *ben adam*. Jesus will clearly reveal Himself as the Son of Man. Psalm 80 is a prayer for the coming of the Messiah, the Good Shepherd and Savior.

### Hebrews 10:5-10

Our pericope today ends a sequential reading from *Hebrews* that was paused several weeks ago but now returns. Our passage from *Hebrews* continues to stress the fact that Jesus is the final sacrifice offered once for all. Not like the high priest who entered the sanctuary once every year on the Day-of-Atonement, or the ritual priests who offered sacrifices daily, Jesus now offers His own blood for all. He is the one perfect unblemished lamb, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

Verses 5-7 are a direct quote from Psalm 40: 7-9: "Sacrifice and offering you do not want; but ears open to obedience you gave me. Holocausts and sin-offerings you do not require; so, I said, 'Here I am; your commands are written in the scroll. To do your will is my delight; my God, your law is in my heart!'" (Ps 40: 7-9).

*When Christ came into the world.* God chose to send His only Son into our world. Christ chose to give His life for us out of love. *The one offering He made perfect forever.* (Hb 10:14). The word that we translate as *perfect* is *teleioo* which means at its deepest level *to complete or fulfill the purpose ordained by God*. Jesus fulfills His purpose in His Passion. "It is for this reason that I came." (Jn 17:4).

*Hebrews* reflects on the OT ritual priesthood, e.g. the priesthood of Melchizedek as a foreshadowing of the Priesthood of Christ. Chapter 7 in the NAB is entitled *Melchizedek, a Type of Christ*. The OT priesthood held the priest to be a mediator between God and the people. The priest was called to mediate the Word of God to the people and to bring the prayers and sacrifices of the people to God. The priest typically was chosen the first son of a family lineage. The king or the leader was considered anointed by God and served in a capacity of priest as well as ruler. All manifestations of OT ritual priesthood are merely and architype of the Great High Priest, Jesus the Christ.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### Hebrews 10:5-10

Whereas the OT Priesthood served the Old Covenant, Jesus is the Priest of the New and Everlasting Covenant sealed with the blood of the Lamb of God. The OT priest entered the Holy of Holies once per year on the day of atonement to offer the animal sacrifice to God for his sins and for the sins of the people. OT priests died and were often replaced by their son(s). The priesthood of Jesus will never pass away. This is the fulfillment of the promise of Yahweh to establish this eternal priesthood from the lineage of King David (See Ps 110:4). There is only one Priest, Jesus. The priesthood of the NT of the New Covenant calls for those who are called by God and ordained to stand in *Persona Christi*, in the person of Christ.

Likewise, the sacrifice offered daily on the Altar of the Holy Mass is a representation of the one sacrifice offered once for all. We no longer offer sacrifices for sin; we make present again the one Sacrifice of Calvary.

### Luke 1:39-45

Luke gives us this beautiful account that we have come to call *The Visitation*. The Holy Spirit has overshadowed Mary, by that same Spirit she is now pregnant with Jesus, the Son of God, the Son of Man. Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit, and she too is bearing a miraculous child in the womb of her old age. The child in her womb, John the Baptist, is also filled with the Holy Spirit as he leaps for joy in the presence of the Lord. Elizabeth, who would have had no prior knowledge of Mary's encounter with the Angel Gabriel, filled with the Holy Spirit, is immediately aware of the presence of God in the womb of Mary.

Theologians over the centuries have taken the events of 2 Samuel and made a parallel with Luke 1: 39-45. David "arose and went" to the same region centuries earlier to retrieve the Ark of God. David, as Elizabeth, was struck with awe standing before the Ark that was housing the presence of God. Like the baby in the womb Elizabeth, David and others leap for joy and dance before the Ark. Mary is now the Ark of the New Covenant.<sup>3</sup>

*And how does this happen, that the mother of my Lord should come to me.* *Lord* is a title for God that Luke has used already in Chapter 1 numerous times, e.g., Luke 1: 6, 9, 11, 15, 16, 17, and 25. Although the title of Jesus as Lord is most often found in the Resurrection scenes, Luke applies it to Jesus throughout his Gospel, e.g., Luke 2:11; 7:13; 10:1; 11:39; 12:42; 17:6; 18:6; 19:8, 31.

*Blessed are you who have believed that what was spoken to you by the Lord would be fulfilled.* The Greek word that is translated as *blessed* is *makaria*. It can mean *happy* but that misses the resonance of the Biblical tradition, which uses the word to denote a condition of righteousness before God. Examples of this can be found in the LXX translation of the Psalms, e.g., Pss 1:1; 2:12; 83:4; and 93:12. *Makaria* is a word that Jesus used in the Beatitudes. Jesus would also make an interesting comment clarifying the meaning of this word *makaria* later in Luke's Gospel. "While He was speaking, a woman in the crowd called out and said to Him, 'Blessed (*makaria*) is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed.' He replied, 'Rather, blessed (*makaria*) are those who hear the word of God and observe it.'" (Lk 11:27-28). To hear the word of God and observe it is to be in a condition of righteousness before God.

*By the Lord would be fulfilled.* The underlying Greek word that we translate as *fulfilled* is *teleiosis*. It is also translated into English as *perfection*. At its deepest level it means to fulfill the purpose for which God created it to be or come to complete God's intent or God's will.

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3. For further study see *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible—The New Testament*, page 107.

## Reflection

May you be filled with the Love, Joy and Peace that Jesus came to bring to earth this Christmas Season. Nine years ago, as I was praying with the Scripture for Gaudete Sunday, which we celebrated last Sunday, I had a major awakening that still guides my spiritual life. I would like to share that with you again.

Joy is always the theme of the third Sunday of Advent and is a prominent theme again this weekend. We are called to rejoice in anticipation of the coming of our savior at Christmas. As I was praying with the scripture during the week I was haunted by images of very sad people that I have known over the years. Some I have counseled. Some were merely acquaintances. I wondered why God was showing me these people, and why now. All of them at least claimed to be atheist. All of them had distanced themselves from God in a very pronounced way. The people that came to mind were the exact opposite of what I would call joyful, or joy filled people.

I often try to look for the opposite of something to help me understand the concept more deeply. As I was seeing these people as the opposite of joy I was trying to articulate in my mind what it was exactly. It was a deep sadness, but more than that. It was a deep-rooted anger, but even more than that. As I looked into their eyes it was an emptiness that I was seeing. It was a lack something that should be there.

The message became clear to me... God wants the opposite of this... God wants us to be filled with His Joy! I immediately recalled the words of Jesus as He walked out into the Garden of Gethsemani, "I have told you this so that My Joy might be in you and your joy be complete." (Jn 15:11) Jesus had just talked at length about the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He prayed that the indwelling of His abiding love would live within us. He gives us the beautiful metaphor of the Vine and the Branches. We called us to remain connected to the vine, the source of life. It is in this connection that we will bear fruit.

The fruits of the Holy Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Gal. 5:22) The opposite of love is not hate. It is apathy, literally a lack of love. The opposite of peace is not war. It is a lack of unity that should be there. The opposite of joy is not sadness but a lack of joy, in fact, emptiness. It occurred to me that the exact opposite of each of the fruits of the Spirit is emptiness.

Many of the images of scripture speak of the emptiness of the human condition without God. The Prodigal Son traveled away from the father's love to the distant country, literally in Greek, the big emptiness. Without God we are empty. We hunger and thirst for God's abiding Spirit, the ground of our being. Scripture abounds with images of this hunger and thirst for God. Jesus is there to offer relief in the from this yearning. He offered the woman at the well the Spirit, "Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (Jn 4:14) In each of the feeding miracle stories large crowds gather and we are told that they are hungry. They always leave satisfied or fulfilled. The yearning and the hunger inside of them is healed by Jesus.

Love, joy and peace come from God. God is the source. God wants all of us be filled with His love, His joy, and His peace. May God's Holy Spirit fill you this Christmas as never before and may the fruits of His Spirit remain with you forever. Come Holy Spirit FILL the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle within us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Merry Christmas,



## Personal Witness

Every time that I contemplate the events of the Visitation I am struck by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in our world. Elizabeth, who would have had no prior knowledge of Mary's encounter with the Angel Gabriel, filled with the Holy Spirit, is immediately aware of the presence of God in the womb of Mary. Even the infant, John the Baptist, in the womb of Elizabeth leaps for joy sensing the presence of God in Mary's womb. A child in a womb would obviously have no mental capacity of its own to discern or contemplate intellectually the presence of God, yet the child is aware through the power of the Holy Spirit. Somehow one soul is connecting with another soul at the level of divine life, through shared Being.

I was blessed to grow up in a very faith filled spiritually rich environment. I have always considered myself a spiritual person. I have shared many times some very profound experiences of God in my childhood and throughout my life. There have been significant periods of spiritual aridity in my life as well, as I at times have drifted away from God, especially by becoming too immersed in worldly pursuits. Through it all God was always walking with me even though I was not always aware of His presence. I am able to reflect back and see the hand of God in my life that I could not see before. I can sense a spiritual connection with God from the moment of my conception until this present moment in time.

Certainly, my awareness of that spiritual presence, that spiritual connection, has varied significantly throughout my life. There were times when I was engulfed in my professional career that I was totally unaware of God in my life for extended periods of time. I had no time for God. I was too busy. In contrast there were times when I was simply overwhelmed with the presence of God. As I lay prostrate in front of the Altar at my ordination, during the invocation of the Holy Spirit, I was overtaken by the power of that Spirit. As I celebrate my first Mass, during the Epiclesis, I again was blown away by the fire of the Holy Spirit flowing through me transforming the gifts of bread and wine into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus, and the Word was made flesh. Time and time again during my years of ministry I have been simply overwhelmed by the presence of the Holy Spirit. The words always came during the Sacrament of Reconciliation that I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt were not my words, but God's words that He wanted the penitent in front of me to hear.

As the years of ministry rolled on, I became a little too complacent with this gift of the Holy Spirit. After being ordained for about 10 years I was invited to be a spiritual director for a pilgrimage to Italy and Medjugorje. I was privileged to travel with 40 very holy people to some of the most holy places on earth. I celebrated Mass daily in some incredibly holy places. We visited the tombs of St. Peter and Paul, and the tomb of Padre Pio. We walked the halls of the Vatican. We walked the hills of Assisi where St. Francis and St. Clare walked. We visited the sites of several Eucharistic Miracles. We climbed the hill of the apparition of Mary.

During this intense two-week spiritual pilgrimage something was happening within me. I seemed to be developing a more sensitive or more well-tuned internal Holy Spirit receptor. Something in the depth of my soul was becoming more keenly aware of the Spiritual realm within and around me. As I returned home to my busy parish life, as I came back to familiar surroundings, something was strangely different. I realized that everything was as I had left it, but I was different. The more fine-tuned internal spiritual antenna that I had been gifted with not only made me more aware of God's presence, but it also was more sensitive to the presence of evil. It made me more aware of the constant battle raging between good and evil. I was experiencing the hand of God and the tug of the devil in some of the most routine and mundane events of everyday life. Consequently, I was drawn into a deeper and more intense prayer life. Every decision that I made or any action that I took was preceded by prayer. My personal life-long relationship with Jesus was never stronger. The veil between heaven and earth, between this life and the afterlife, between the spiritual and the corporeal realms seemed almost transparent. To this day the veil continues to tear from top to bottom.

*F. Glenn*