

Fourth Sunday of Advent – December 20, 2015, Year C

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: Micah 5:2-4 and various

***"God's Gift Foretold"***

It is all about preparation, isn't it? It all depends on what eyes you are looking through as we prepare for the joyous celebration of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ on this coming Christmas Day. I believe that it is not only about wrapping and decorations, of which the folks have done a marvelous job in preparing our church for Christmas, but the preparation should be in our hearts. It is so very important that we stop and examine the many signs that God, Himself, gave to the world that our Savior, Jesus the Messiah was coming. I would like for us to look at some of the prophecies that were given to the world that pointed to Jesus' miraculous birth – so many of which were delivered between 1,450 and 430 BC. Manuscripts were written and told at least between 400 to 1,000 years before Jesus was born. Truly, God's Gift foretold!

Imagine any of us trying to predict something a few days beforehand, let alone 4 to 15 centuries from now. Weather people can botch it up and sometimes miss the mark. I am hoping that it will be dry this Christmas, unlike last year. We used to say when we lived in Jacksonville for almost nine years, "if you don't like the weather – wait ten minutes!" I would see it rain on one side of the street and not on the other. We learn, and forecasters use a lot of different things. These prophecies speak of the timing, location, and even the exact circumstances of His birth. Who but Almighty God could not only plan such things – but lay out the visible path for people to follow - leading to the greatest event in the history of mankind. It separated time in two - when God Himself willingly took on human form.

So, let's start at the very beginning – in Genesis – right in the Garden of Eden, when people disobeyed God. The Lord told the serpent and the woman that He promised for salvation to come from her seed. He said *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* (Genesis 3:15) If sin would separate us and keep us from God – then the only way forward would be for God to come to us!

Throughout the Old Testament there are signs and people that point to Jesus, as what are called "types" of His coming. In Genesis 22, I have shared this with you many times about Abraham and his young only son, Isaac, carries the wood for his imminent sacrifice up the mountain. The obedience of his father, Abraham, pleased God much and so God promised Abraham: *"In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."* (Genesis 22:18) Just go to Matthew 1:1 to read the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah, and you will see this promise fulfilled all the way back to Father Abraham. Isaac was the son of the promise - not Ishmael. If you go to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem there are Muslims there who will tell you that Abraham took Ishmael to that mountain to sacrifice him – there is no proof of that – but the Bible is proof of Isaac. For God said to Abraham regarding Ishmael, *"Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned."* (Genesis 21:12) This

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promise is fulfilled in the genealogy of Jesus found in the Gospel of Luke 3:34 tracing all the way back through Isaac and to Abraham. There are flashing road signs all the way!

Looking at the Book of Exodus and the details that God gives to Moses for building the Tabernacle – down to the tiniest details of cubits - we can easily understand that we serve a God of detail and He gives us so many regarding the birth of His Son, our Savior. God uses the Prophet to give the details – Micah to tell us where, and Isaiah to tell us the details - not only the Tribe from which He will be born, but from the family. Isaiah reveals to us that He will be born from the Family of Jesse: *"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit."* (Isaiah 11:1) God uses the words of the Prophet Jeremiah to give us even more details of His birth *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land." "In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness."* (Jeremiah 23:5-6) The words of the prophets are verified as being fulfilled in Luke 3:31-32 in the genealogy of Jesus Christ born of the family of Jesse, who as we learn in Samuel 16:4-13 is King David's Father, and so the Messiah is born of the House of David.

Jesse and David come from the small town about 6 miles from Jerusalem, called Beit Lechem. It is so interesting to learn of Samuel's search for a successor to King Saul in 1 Samuel chapter 16. Incredibly, he goes to visit Jesse to look at his sons. He asks if he has any more. Jesse answers that he has a young son out in the fields. This young shepherd with a ruddy complexion is called from the fields to meet the prophet and be anointed. This town we call Bethlehem is surrounded by shepherd's fields and sloping hillsides which would become quite useful as the angels announced the birth of Jesus on that first Christmas. His birth in Bethlehem is foretold in today's Old Testament reading from Micah in your bulletin *"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."* (Micah 5:2) You cannot get any older than the "Ancient of Days", "I Am" "Yahweh." The ancient name Ephrathah means "fruitful", and Bethlehem means "house of bread." This little town is VERY fruitful - it brings us King David and his line – Solomon – which brings us Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Isn't it incredible that One who always was, One from the days of eternity – would be born as the "Bread of Life" in the "House of Bread." This amazing prophecy would be fulfilled, in spite of "no room" for the King in a fitting place like the inn, but instead where animals feed, in a manger, as is in Luke 2:4-7 *"Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child. While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn."* The King of the Universe was born in a lowly stable – among animals – but you need to understand this - He did it willingly – He chose to be born in that state - to humbly become human.

These are just a few of the prophecies that point to the birth of Jesus, but there are many more with many more details. After Jesus' birth, evil King Herod became so jealous because of the birth of another king in his kingdom. This enraged him and he ordered all young male children to be killed. It was not safe for the baby Jesus! The Prophet Hosea foretold a Son coming out of Egypt: (Hosea 11:1) *"When Israel was a youth I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son."* This prophecy was fulfilled in Matthew 2:13 with the family fleeing to Egypt.

The Prophet Jeremiah gave insight to the weeping that would take place on behalf of the young boys, slain, sacrificed because of an insane king. Matthew 2:16-18 reports of the fulfillment of this prophecy after the Magi wisely decided *not to report to him: "When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi."* *"Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."* Bethlehem was also the home of Rachel's tomb, the wife of Jacob (also known as Israel) and it was the scene of the slaughter of these innocent young boys. No wonder Rachel wept!

God used the Prophet Isaiah to tell us how the Messiah would live as a grown man in chapter 53 as the suffering servant, and how He would affect and save His people in chapter 61. Through Isaiah, God foretold that Jesus would be born of a virgin and the name that the angel would call Him. (Isaiah 7:14) *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."* This incredible prophecy would be fulfilled in Matthew 1:18 *"This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit."* As well as Matthew 1:23 *"The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"-- which means, "God with us."*

The Psalms are also enriched with prophetic words leading us to the birth of the King of Kings. For example Psalm 72:10-11 tells us of the Lord being worshipped and presented gifts by Kings. We are so blessed because we can look back and see these things took place: *"Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts. And let all kings bow down before him."* In the Gospel of Matthew we see this fulfilled (Matthew 2:11) *"After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh."* Gold for the King of Kings!

King Solomon wrote in Psalm 72 that the baby Jesus would be worshipped by Shepherds (Psalm 72:9) *"Let the nomads of the desert bow before him."* This prophetic wisdom would be fulfilled in Luke 2:15-16 *"When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds began saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this*

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*thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger."*

The Lordship of the newborn King was foretold by King David himself in Psalm 110:1 as he was speaking of God, Yahweh, as Lord speaking to the Lord – "Adonai," the Messiah – the Christ, who has taken His place in glory (Psalm 110:1) "*The LORD says to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for Your feet."*" We see this come to life in Luke 2:11 as the Angels revealed to the shepherds Jesus' identity for the whole world to know: "*for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*" Adonai! Christ meaning Messiah, and Adonai meaning Lord.

And most importantly the undeniable prophesy that Jesus is the Son of God. David, the Psalmist writes in Psalm 2:7 "*I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'*" Three of the four Gospels verify this prophesy with the Baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan in which John the Baptist, the son of Zechariah, a priest, laid hands on Him, and instead of the river opening as it had before when the Ark of the Covenant passed through, and Elijah went to heaven. Instead the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended like a dove and the voice of God the Father speaks. Listen carefully because this was the scene where the Holy Trinity was present:

- Luke 3:22 "*and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, "You are My beloved Son, in You I am well-pleased."*
- Matthew 3:16-17 "*After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."*
- Mark 1:11 "*And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*"

There are over 400 prophecies in the Old Testament which point to the coming Messiah and then to His life and death. Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled every single one of them. The odds of someone doing that who was not the Messiah are too great to even try to figure. I believe the evidence of Jesus' Lordship is indisputable. Taking the Apostle Thomas for example – his reaction to meeting the risen Lord was one that says it all saying "*My Lord and my God.*" Those words from today's Holy Gospel in John chapter 20, on this feast of St. Thomas should be our focus this Christmas. Isn't it interesting that this is the only record of someone calling Jesus both Lord and God in His presence? Jesus responded with encouragement and hope: "*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"

As we prepare on this Last Sunday of Advent, I want to invite you to learn from the example of the Magi, the wise men, who through faith, followed the star, not knowing the final destination of their journey, and then fell down and worshipped the King of Kings. Like them, look for the

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Light of His presence to guide you, – and let Him direct your life's journey through prayer, study and reading His Word. May God bless you this Christmas as we celebrate God's Gift foretold.