

# Messiah

The Prophetic Message on the coming of Christ

narrative, we have just a taste of his coming treachery. Herod now knows that the messiah is born in Bethlehem. He knows that his own advisors are ignorant of the event. He moves to use these true worshipers of Christ for his evil purpose.

Later patristic reflection on Herod asks us to look in the mirror. In Herod the fathers see the “false” worshipers of Christ. Those who want to appear as a true follower for the outside world to see. But really they follow their own hearts desire, not the path of the Lord.

Are we true followers of Christ or merely making appearances for all “Jerusalem” to see?

## Chrysostom

In Chrysostom’s homily 7 on Matthew, quoted here, he asks us to note God’s providence in providing his chosen people with all these prophecies concerning Christ. But this providence of God

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can become a judgement if one does not act on God’s gift. Just as Micah reminded his contemporaries that the “Day of the Lord” is coming, the Jews of Christ’s time must acknowledge this new “Day of the Lord” in the coming of Christ.

Chrysostom points out that this knowledge removes all excuses for not responding. When one is prepared for the coming of the messiah, there is no excuse for missing the event when it occurs.

However, Christians must not take this too smugly. For we are now the chosen people. We have received the message of the prophets. We now live in that “Day of the Lord.” How can we smugly condemn those chosen people of yesterday for missing the coming of Christ? Instead we must take this as a warning not to repeat the error in our own lives. Will

Christ come again into our hearts in this years Nativity?

But at the time of the birth just so many things happened as were fitted quietly to mark out Him that was come. Thus, in order that the Jews might not say, “We know not when He was born, nor where abouts,” both all these events in which the wise men were concerned were brought about by God’s providence, and the rest of things which we have mentioned; so that they would have no excuse to plead, for having inquired into that which had come to pass. But mark also the exactness of the prophecy. For it does not say, “He will abide in Bethlehem,” but “He will come out.” So that too was subject to the prophecy that he was simply born there.

The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul, seeing I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.”

## Bethlehem

Everyone knows that Jesus is born in Bethlehem, but why? The city of Bethlehem has a rich history in the salvation of ancient Israel. While Saul was king of Israel (1000 BC), the powerful Philistines threatened the fledgling Israelite monarchy. Saul gathered his army to face the threat, but Saul no longer kept his trust in God. The Philistine army was powerful and the Israelites were afraid. They no longer placed their trust and hope in God. They faced the human might of the enemy and lost faith.

God visited his prophet Samuel and instructed him to “Fill your horn with oil.” This means prepare to anoint a new king, a new ‘messiah’, anointed one. God sends Samuel to Bethlehem of Judea to the

Micah

Micah was a prophet living in a small village among the poor right before Israel was invaded by a powerful foreign enemy.

He speaks against the abuses of the wealthy and promises that God will bring justice through his anointed. This anointed one is connected to Bethlehem and the anointing of David as king to save an earlier Israel in trouble with foreign powers.



house of Jesse. Here in Bethlehem, a small village, least of Judea, the messiah will be found.

This son of Jesse is David, who goes on to become the great king of Israel. But not so when he is anointed to lead. Prior to seeing all the sons of Jesse the Lord warns Samuel “The Lord sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” David is the young-

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

est, weakest, smallest son of Jesse. He is not even old enough to join the army. But this small weak one from the small insignificant village is the Lords anointed.

The Lord reads David's heart and understands that he will become great. David goes to join his older brothers at the battle field. He can see with the eyes of faith what Saul and the great warriors of Israel cannot see. David steps forward to battle the giant Goliath, against all odds he is successful. The lord promises David the victory and David has faith.

## Day of the Lord

David of Bethlehem is the foundation of Micah's prophecy some 300 years later. Micah stands on the brink of invasion by powerful enemies, just as in the reign of Saul. He condemns the lack of faith and corruption among the powerful. They are no better than Saul and his cohorts. They no longer deserve to hold their position of leadership in the community of Israel. Therefore, the

Lord will replace them with his anointed, one who is worthy to lead.

In that day, says the LORD, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away, and those whom I have afflicted; and the lame I will make the remnant; and those who were cast off, a strong nation; and the LORD will reign over them in Mount Zion from this time forth and for evermore. But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little 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 days. Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in travail has brought forth; then the rest of his brethren shall return to the people of Israel. 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 dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth.

Micah calls for a great "Day of the Lord." This "Day of the Lord" will bring deliverance of Israel from their enemies. The outcast, lame and afflicted will find salvation. God will rule his people again from the holy mountain. But not everyone in the kingdom of Israel will be saved by the Lord. Those who abused their position and behaved badly will be punished.

Micah sees this anointed as coming from Bethlehem, just as David did in the time of Saul. This prophecy is then fulfilled in the birth of Christ.

The church reads this passage from Micah twice on the eve of the Nativity of Our Lord, at Royal Hours in the morning and vespers in the evening. We see the fulfillment of this prophecy in those healed by the ministry of Christ. Jesus' birth in Bethlehem starts this process. The "Day of the Lord" has dawned with the birth of the Sun of Righteousness in the town of David.

## Matthew

This Nativity reading of Micah is prompted by Matthew's use of the passage in the Nativity story. The location of Bethlehem is foretold in Micah. Our liturgical reading expands the selection to encompass the context of the promise inherent in this location. The Bethlehem promise means a "Day of the Lord." The salvation of the downtrodden and weak. This looks forward from the birth to the coming ministry and ultimate "Day of the Lord", Pascha. Even on this day of the birth of Christ we see the shadow of the day he will die and rise again.

Matthew's narrative focuses on the theology of geography. Bethlehem is the focus because in this city "God is with Us." There is a contrast set up between the smallness of the location and the greatness of the event. The birth of a king deserves notice and appropriate proclamation. God provides this in the star.

The wise men, court astrologers, from the east see the change in the night sky. God provides this celestial sign for those who

worship stars.

For Israel, there is the word of the prophets and the study of the Law. Those who devote their lives to these studies in Jerusalem are in the court of Herod.

These Israelite wise men know that the messiah will be born in Bethlehem. But they miss the signs.

The foreign wise men know the real truth. That the messiah is born now. The signs of the time are correct. Those closest to the Law and the prophets cannot see the events in their own backyard. Those without any knowledge of the true God are drawn in from afar.

They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: 'And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.'" Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him."

Matthew 2:5-8  
Micah 5:1 &

## Herod

Herod is a well documented figure in the historical literature. We see later in Matthew's account his ruthless nature in the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem. This behavior is entirely consistent with a ruler who has two of his own sons executed. But at this point in Matthew's