

Introduction

- Tendency to stumble into the story of Christmas...
- Hear some of the Old Testament passages, such as this one, which are commonly read at carol services and the like....
 - and let them wash over us
 - not engage at all with what they have to say to us
- I'd guess - maybe I'm being harsh - that for many of us **we engage with this passage at the level of:**
 - "the Old Testament says that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem"
 - which is true!
 - but its hardly all that this passage says!!
- What was the hope with which Jews waited for the coming Messiah?
 - what did they yearn for, promised from of old?

Background in Micah

- "Parachuting" into a book is always difficult!
 - what is Micah about? what is he trying to say?
 - will understanding that help us take in what he says in this particular passage?
- Generation after Amos, generation before Hosea, and before Isaiah too
 - speaking to two kingdoms
 - message intertwined judgement and hope...
 - *"what you are doing is not right... there will be judgement... but God will make right all that is spoiled and rotten"*
 - so we have **judgements** against the capital cities Samaria and Jerusalem in chapter one, but **deliverance** promised in chapter two (v.12ff)
 - we have leaders and prophets **rebuked** in chapter three, but **the mountain of the Lord** described in chapter four, the hope for God's real made manifest
 - and into chapter 5, the verses we read have a prophesy of insult against the current earthly ruler, part of the judgement of conquest and defeat...
- **But then comes the contrast, the familiar prophecy of a ruler out of Bethlehem:**
 - and the nature, character and role of that ruler

A ruler from Bethlehem

- There is more than simply a geographical note here, a confirmation that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.
 - places had and still have a significance!
 - and so it is here....
- Bethlehem: **echoes of David**
 - who was also from Bethlehem
 - who was the model king, under whose reign Israel had known her greatest peace, security and influence
 - and who was a model of faith, a **"man after God's heart"**
- Bethlehem: **note of humility:**
 - not from the seat of government in Jerusalem
 - **indeed, when Jesus was born it wasn't in the richest part of town either!**
- And so being from Bethlehem pointed towards that character of the coming ruler!
 - **a great, yet humble king**

A ruler from of old

- **God had this plan** - to save through his Son - **from of old**
 - as we saw in Leviticus recently in the mornings, and again in the evenings more recently with Prophet, Priest and King, the Old Testament points forward inexorably to God's sent one, **Messiah**
 - it wasn't a case of God saying: **"let's try laws - that should help them live for me"**

- giving Moses the 10 commandments... and seeing it all go horribly wrong!
- then God thinking: "Hmm - how about priests and sacrifices, maybe that would help them remember?" - and giving instructions for altar and Temple, etc... and seeing that fail to keep his people faithful!
- and then God thinking: "Got it - prophets! Who could fail to remain faithful with the likes of Elijah and Elisha and Isaiah around?" - and inspiring them... and still God's people slink off to idolatry!
- No, God's plans to send his son were "from of old"
 - this was plan A, not B or C - indeed, there was no plan B
 - Jesus' coming was the fulfilment, culminating in the Cross and Resurrection, of God's rescue mission for lost humans

A ruler who will shepherd

- Shepherd - guide, look after, shelter, lead to water, provide for his people

A ruler whose strength is the Lord's

- Not some mere human strength
 - that would not have been up to the task!
 - consequence is we can have confidence in Jesus' rule - his strength, reliability, trustworthiness - because he rules in the strength of the Lord

A ruler full of majesty

- Majesty - of, or pertaining to kings, of the character that a king would have, imbued with the authority, dignity, etc of one who has the right to rule
 - this promised one will be full of that - and not his own majesty, but the majesty of the name of the Lord his God
 - he will draw attention to God's kingship, and draw glory to him!

A ruler who brings security

- OT nations were vulnerable - yearn for physical security
- Today we often yearn for security - housing, pensions, financial
 - but our ultimate security lies in our relationship with Jesus
 - we - God's people - can be all we were made to be only when we are in relationship with the one who made us

A ruler is his people's peace

- Not gives, but is
- Our peace comes as he lives in us
 - it is in his presence that there is peace, peace with God and the transforming ability to forgive others and live at peace with them!

Conclusion

- What a promise!!
 - and all of this is fulfilled in Jesus!!

Prayer

- Lord, as we come to another Christmas, open our eyes again to all that you have given to us in Jesus!