

# The Invasion of Grace

Micah 2:2-5a; Luke 1-39-45

INTRO:

Into our broken world of trouble and distress a savior has come. Because on our own and with our sin we could not come to God. So, God came to us. *The invasion of grace*. The advent of Christ is God invading our world with **wholeness** and **grace**.

ME:

I am ready for Christmas. I am ready for *the Invasion of Grace*.

YOU:

**Are you ready?** I heard earlier today that Christmas will be here **real** soon.

**Did you hear that? So, are you ready for the Invasion of Grace?** Micah

is here to help us get ready:

Let's prepare our hearts in prayer...

GOD:

***Micah 5:2 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. 3 Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is***

***in labor has brought forth; then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel. 4 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 live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; 5 and he shall be the one of peace.***

WE:

Micah speaks to a people who are oppressed. They went into exile after military defeat. They were suffering a lot. Micah elsewhere tells them that they have brought this on themselves. They had done it through their sin.

Today, though, Micah is so much more hopeful. The people don't see any see hope. But Micah does, and he points to it. He points to the image of a shepherd. In the Hebrew Bible, the shepherd is often spoken of by the prophets as one who will **gather** and **reconstruct** a defeated and scattered Israel.

***Micah says that this shepherd is coming.***

These words are to a people in a severe national crisis. So, they are words about a divine invasion into a desperate situation.

Micah is jumping up and down waving his arms, trying desperately to point us in a different direction. He points to a small, out of the way place. A little town called Bethlehem. He points to a leader who stands in the strength of the Lord. Not in the power of weapons or territory or wealth.

***Here is a difference that makes a difference.***

These words from Micah fit well with Mary's Magnificat. As we heard earlier from the reading from Luke, Mary is told that she is to have a baby by the Holy Spirit. Then Mary breaks into song:

GOD:

***Luke 1:46 And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, 48 for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. 50 His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. 51 He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. 52 He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; 53 he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. 54 He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, 55 according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever."***

**Did you listen? Did you like her lullaby?** If you liked her lullaby, *you didn't listen!*

***It's a war cry, not a lullaby!***

Through Mary God makes good on his promises to suffering Israel! **There is absolutely nothing spiritual or private about what God is doing here. At least not according to Mary's song!** God is moving politically, eco-

**nominally, strategically. The ones in power are going to be cast down. The oppressed and the lowly will be lifted up. The prophecy of a great transition power.**

Advent expects that transition. We have been waiting all these Sundays for this deliverance. Here we are, on the very door step of this salvation.

This is a time of **claiming** these promises of God and **celebrating** their fulfillment in Jesus coming among us.

The seventeenth-century poet George Herbert noticed that the letters of *Mary's* name can also spell the word *army*. **Is there some kind of connection to be made between the name of Mary and the forces of death and violence? Does this lowly maiden also hold within her a confrontation with the forces of death?**

Take this as a parable, not just about the way we ought to respond to life (you have to engage, throw yourself in). It is also a parable of the incarnation, Almighty God deals with us in the nativity at Bethlehem. *Our God did not remain distant from human trouble but, in the incarnation, threw himself in!*

It is strange that God invaded our world as a baby. It is similar to Bret Hart's short story "**The Luck of Roaring Camp.**"

In a tough, lawless mining camp out west in the late 1880s, a miner discovered a little baby who had been abandoned by his parents. The baby is brought back to the camp. Here are a group of rough-and-tumble miners who have, of all things, a baby. As soon as the baby is brought into camp, the **transformation** begins. One by one, each of the miners becomes a different person. There are clothes to be made, meals to cook, washing and tending to be done, all for the little baby of Roaring Camp. This **transformation** spread to the whole camp. Swearing and cursing, fighting and feuding, once typical of Roaring Camp, now stop. Each man tries to be on his best behavior because of the baby.

This is a parable of *the Invasion of Grace* that happens among us at Christmas.

WE:

Micah inspires us to look for God's activities in people and places that are not even on the map! In places like Bethlehem and in the stables of our world and of our lives. We are invited to study the prophet's gaze and to follow it until we turn our attention, our full attention, to God.

Advent's call is a call to the eyes, the ears, the hearts that are trained to expect the unexpected and to listen for the least likely voices.

THE SERMON IN A SENTENCE:

***God has invaded us with his grace, what will we do about it this Christmas?***

**“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”** That was the song the angels sang when Jesus was born. The words the angels sang are almost the exact quote from the decrees of Augustus Caesar, one of the greatest rulers the worlds has ever known. When Augustus became empower, he had himself declared one of the gods. He built a gauge statue in the Roman forum, eleven times bigger than a normal man. At one point, through the Roman army, Augustus controlled every inch of the Western world.

**Do you see what is happening in the Gospel account of Jesus' birth?**

**“Glory to a god in the Highest, an on earth, peace...”** This was the decree of the angelic message gets at Jesus’ birth. They are announcing a new Ming, as new empower, one greater that Augustus.

The story of Christians and the incarnation is politically charged. It is the story, not simply of a baby born to Mary and Joseph, but a new king. And Augustus and his whole army can’t do anything to stop the progress of this baby king and his people. The *Invasion of Grace* has begun.

CLOSE:

On Christmas Eve in 1865, a young Episcopal priest named Phillips Brooks approached Bethlehem on horseback and then worshipped in the ancient

Basilica of the Nativity. The simplicity and the beauty of the service made a lasting impression on him. Three years later, while he was serving as the rector of Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia, the Sunday school children asked Brooks to write a new Christmas song. The memory of his Christmas Eve in Bethlehem came rushing back. He penned the words in a single evening. On Christmas morning in 1868 the little children of Holy Trinity first sang a song that has become one of the best loved of all the carols, O Little Town of Bethlehem.

It took years for the carol to work its way in to the hearts of Christians around the world. As it did, the pastor who crafted the words grew to become one of the great preachers of the nineteenth century. He was a pretty big guy too, at 6 foot 4. Phillips Brooks became even larger in his theological and moral reach.

So let's hear the words from Micah again before we sing the words of Brooks:

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***And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; 5 and he shall be the one of peace.***

**Let's pray to the Shepherd who has come...**