

Fourth Sunday of Advent
Cycle C RCL
Revised

Micah 5:2-5a (Hebrew: 5:1-4a)

The introduction to this book locates work of Micah, a younger contemporary of Isaiah from the town of Moresheth (modern *Tell el-Judeideh*), near the border with Philistia during the reigns of the Judean Kings Jotham (750–735 BCE), Ahaz (735–715 BCE) and Hezekiah (715–687 BCE). Whatever terrors might await Judah in this time of Assyrian domination of the near east, Micah believes that God will protect Zion from ultimate destruction and provides the present prophecy to affirm that God will give Judah a messianic king to save it. Indeed, Zion’s ultimate salvation will again come from David’s birth city (Bethlehem) as it did beforehand. Ephrathah is the name of a family of the tribe of Judah but is also used as a place name (Genesis 35:16, 19; 48:7a; Ruth 4:11; Micah 5:2). There is another tradition that locates Ephrathah north of Jerusalem in the region of Bethel/Ramah (Genesis 35:16 1 Samuel 10:2; Jeremiah 31:15). The gentilic *‘efrati* (Ephrathite) refers to someone from Bethlehem in 1 Samuel 17:12 and Ruth 1:2. In Judges 12:5, 1 Samuel 1:1 and 1 Kings 11:26, however, “Ephrathite” refers to someone from Ephraim.

Canticle 3 or 15 The Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

The Magnificat is a *hymn* otherwise unknown to us from Scripture but very much like the Song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Some Old Latin translations of Luke make Elizabeth, not Mary, the one who sings this song; but the textual tradition in favor of Mary is overwhelming. That there should be psalms outside the Book of Psalms is no surprise. Jonah 2:2-10 (Hebrew: 2:2-9), for instance, is a psalm of thanksgiving. A Psalm scroll recovered from Cave 11 at Qumran contained additional psalms, some of which occur in the Greek and Syriac Bibles but several of which were previously unknown to researchers.

Psalms 80:1-7

In Babylon there was no temple for the Jews where they might pour out their lamentations to the Lord. Nevertheless, Jewish writers, probably priests, imitated the style of the Jerusalem temple’s old *community laments* to decry their Exile and to attempt to rouse the God, who once ruled in Zion, to come to their aid once more.

Hebrews 10:5-10

Psalm 40:6-8, quoted in Hebrews 10:5b-7, is a *thanksgiving psalm* for deliverance from danger. To bring about this salvation, the psalmist claims, God required no sacrifices (Psalm 40:6-8; Greek: 39:7-9). The author of Hebrews has understood these verses to show the inability of the temple ritual to accomplish forgiveness of sins. Only in the true, heavenly sanctuary is there an effective sacrifice for sins, the once-for-all death of Jesus. The reading in 5b “but a body you have prepared for me” is that of the best Greek manuscripts.

Luke 1:39-49

Ein Karim in West Jerusalem is the traditional site of this meeting, but the author only vaguely identifies the home of Elizabeth as lying within the “hill country” of Judea. Many first-century Jews believed that the Holy Spirit left Israel at the time of the desecration of the temple in 167 BCE and would return only with the Messiah, so the reference to Elizabeth’s being “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41) suggests that the messianic times have now arrived.