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Sermonic Study on Micah 5:2-8

CHRISTMAS DAY

By TH. LAETSCH

V. 2. "And thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, smaller than to be among the thousands of Judah." The Prophet addresses Bethlehem, and in order to distinguish it from a Bethlehem in Zebulon (Joshua 19:15), its ancient name Ephratah, the fruitful, is added. This is the only time that Bethlehem is construed as a masculine, perhaps because the term is not merely to be the name of a city (cities, as a rule, are feminine) but is also to convey the significant meaning of this name, "the house of bread." "House," *bet*, is masculine in Hebrew. Here He was born who is indeed the "Bread of Life" (John 6:48). For this reason also the ancient name Ephratah, "fertile," may have been added, symbolical of the fruitfulness of the Messiah. (Cp. Ps. 22:26-32; 72:15-17; Is. 53:10-12.)

Already in the time of Moses the place was known as Bethlehem. In Gen. 35:19 the older name Ephrath (v. 16) is identified with Bethlehem. Evidently Jacob hoped to find rich pasture here for his herds and flocks.

Before coming to the village, Rachel gave birth to Benjamin and was buried near the little town (Gen. 35:16 ff.). Here Ruth gleaned on the field of Boaz (Ruth 2:1 f.). Here David was born and spent his youth as a faithful shepherd of his father's flock. Yet David did not choose his native town as his royal city, but the city of Jerusalem, which he had wrested from the Jebusites. Even though Bethlehem was surrounded by fertile fields, even though it was the birthplace of the founder of the royal dynasty, and even though it was later fortified by the Philistines (2 Sam. 23:14) and by Rehoboam (2 Chron. 11:6), it remained a small and unimportant city. It is not named among the cities allotted to the tribe of Judah by Joshua, although more than one hundred cities are listed, most of which are completely unknown (Josh. 15:21-63). Micah calls it a city too small to be among the thousands, towns numbering about one thousand inhabitants. Nor is it named among the cities which Judah again possessed after the exile (Ezra 2:3-5). The people at Christ's time called it a village (John 7:42). Yet the Lord God, who usually selects

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small things to perform great miracles, selected the little town of Bethlehem as the birthplace of the incarnate Son of God.

"Out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be Ruler in Israel." "Come forth," *yaza*, does not per se mean to be born, but to go forth (Gen. 8:19; 10:11; Ruth 1:7; etc.). It may mean to go forth by birth (cp. Gen. 25:25-26; 38:28; 2 Kings 20:18), but there the context clearly defines the manner of going forth. The *yaza* by itself in our passage would as little denote the birth of this Ruler as the same expression "to go forth" in Micah 4:10 has anything to do with being born, but rather speaks of Jerusalem's population going forth from the city into the Babylonian exile. The word simply tells us that the promised Ruler would go forth, issue, not from Jerusalem, but from Bethlehem; not from the royal city, but from a small, unimportant village. The context, however, speaks of a birth which had already been announced by Isaiah (7:14) as one of the greatest miracles of the ages, the birth of a son by a virgin who, while she conceived and gave birth, remained what she was, a pure virgin, "who knew not a man" (Luke 1:34). This context and the fulfillment of this promise (Luke 1 and 2) show that the going forth which the Lord had in mind when He caused Micah to write this prophecy was not merely the issuing forth from Bethlehem of a Ruler who might have been born in any other city of Judah, but of a Ruler who would be born at the native town of His ancestor, David, the forefather of Judah's royal dynasty. So the Jews correctly understood this prophecy (Matt. 2:6; John 7:42).

"Ruler in Israel," rather, Ruler of Israel. The preposition *ʾal* in this connection always means "over." Such a Ruler had long ago and time and again been prophesied. Jacob on his deathbed had prophesied the coming of Shiloh, the peaceful, unto whom would be the gathering of the people (Gen. 49:10 f.). Hannah, the mother of Samuel, hoped for and worshiped the promised King Messiah, to whom the Lord would give strength and power (1 Sam. 2:10). (Cp. also 2 Sam. 7:12-16; Ps. 2; 22:23-32; 45; 47; 72; 110; Is. 9:6,7; etc.) Isaiah had also foretold the Virgin Birth (7:14). And now Micah is chosen to add another line to the picture of King Messiah as presented in the word of prophecy throughout the ages. Bethlehem, the small, insignificant town, was

to be honored by being the place from which He who was to be the Ruler of Israel was to come forth by birth.

"Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." Of old, *mikkedem*. *Kedem* properly is that which lies before; transferred to time, that which lies before us in the more or less distant past. That may be a century, or a millennium, or several millenniums; or finally arriving at the first day on which God created time, we see before our astonished vision that timeless, ageless eternity, which no man's mind can comprehend, where nothing, no one, existed save He who calls Himself I Am that I Am. The context must decide whether *kedem* denotes "old," "ancient," in the sense of time or of ageless eternity. It is used in the former sense, e. g., Deut. 33:15 (mountains of old); Is. 19:11 (kings); Ps. 143:5; etc.; in the latter, e. g., Ps. 55:19; Hab. 1:12; the plural, Prov. 8:23. "From everlasting," *mime olam*, derived from a root, meaning "to be hidden," is used to denote time "hidden," time of which the beginning, or the end, or both, are unknown, unknowable, or nonexistent. That *olam* is a term for eternity when ascribed to God is evident from such passages as Ps. 90:2; Prov. 8:23; Is. 63:16; etc.; that it refers to His acts in time, from Is. 42:14; 44:7; 63:9; Jer. 2:20. Again, the context must decide whether *olam* refers to time or to eternity.

Micah states that the "goings forth" of the Ruler are from of old, from everlasting. What is the meaning of "goings forth," and to which goings forth does Micah refer, those in time or those in eternity, or both? "Goings forth," *mozaoth*, is derived from *yaza*, to go forth. The feminine plural occurs only here and in the Masoretic correction of the vulgar Hebrew word for "privy," substituting for it "outgoings," excrements. The masculine form occurs quite frequently and may mean (1) the place of going forth (e. g., Ezek. 42:11; 43:11, gates; 2 Kings 2:21, water springs); (2) that which proceeds from (Num. 30:13; Deut. 8:3; Jer. 17:16); (3) the act of going forth (2 Sam. 3:25; Ps. 19:7, A. V. 6; Hos. 6:3; Ezek. 12:4; Dan. 9:25). In our passage it can mean only the act of going forth, since eternity is no place. The plural may refer to a number of "goings forth," or it may be the plural of amplification, referring to a single act, but viewing this act in its various stages or steps. Compare Jer. 2:2, where both "thy youth" and "thy espousals" are plural in the Hebrew

text, although the reference very clearly is to only one youth and one espousal.* Again the context must decide whether the plural refers to one outgoing or a number of them.

How, then, are we to understand these words of Micah, "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting"? They certainly cannot merely signify that the pedigree of this Child can be traced back into the ancient past, since this is true of every descendant of Abraham and David (cp. 1 Chron. 1:1-28; 2:1-15). A lineage dating back to ancient times could not serve as a special characteristic of the future Ruler. The ancient rabbis referred these words to the uttering of the Messiah's name in eternity; Calvin, to the eternal predestination of Christ to the Messianic office. Yet neither the one nor the other can possibly be called a going forth. Neither can the words denote the many preparations made by God from the earliest times in prophecy and history for the founding of the Messianic kingdom. For the words speak not of the founding of a kingdom, nor of the preparation for such a kingdom, nor of the many prophecies or any prophecy of the going forth or goings forth of the Ruler. The Prophet speaks of *mozaoth*, goings forth, and of the birth of a *person*, the future King. Preparing or foretelling forthgoings is quite a different matter from the act of forthgoing.

The context very definitely speaks of a going forth (verbal form) from Bethlehem, and this going forth is defined more exactly as a birth by a human mother (v.3). If the verb "go forth" is identified by the Prophet with the birth of the future Ruler, why should not the noun form *mozaoth*, goings forth, or going forth, attributed to this child, refer to another going forth, or other goings forth, of this child by birth. There are no other *mozaoth*, births, or birth, in time recorded of this child. Yet Micah knew of another birth of this future Ruler to be born at Bethlehem. He knew Is. 7:14, where this child is called Immanuel. He knew Is. 9:6-7, which speaks of the gift by birth of a Man Child who is at the same time the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father. Micah 5:2-8 constantly refers to these two prophecies of his contemporary, as

* So *shilluchim*, plural, literally "sendings away," is "divorce," sing., Ex. 18:2; *kippurim* (Ex. 29:36; 30:10; etc.), not "atonements," but atonement; *binot*, fem. pl. (Is. 27:11), insight, Ges.-Kautzsch, par. 124 e. f. We might compare the English "news," "tidings."

we shall see. If Isaiah does not hesitate to call this Child the Everlasting Father, why should not Micah's words refer to the eternal birth of Him of whom God Himself had proclaimed: "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee (Ps. 2:7)"? Why should these words not refer to Him who claims for Himself a bringing forth, a birth, before the heavens and the earth were made, who was set up from everlasting (*meolam*), or ever the earth was (*mikadme erez*) (Prov. 8:23), when He was by the Lord as His Master Workman (Prov. 8:30), at the side of Him who is God from everlasting to everlasting (Ps. 90:2)?

As the context obliges us to refer *olam* and *kedem* to eternity, so the context demands the reference of *mozaoth*, going forth, to the eternal birth and therefore its interpretation as plural in form only, not in meaning. It is this one timeless going forth from the Father by eternal generation that distinguishes this Child, born at Bethlehem, from all other descendants of David. And this eternal birth, His eternal Sonship alone, qualifies the Babe of Bethlehem for His work.

V. 3. "Therefore will He give them up." "He," Jehovah; "them," Judah. Micah had foretold the complete destruction of Jerusalem (ch. 3:12) because of its wickedness (3:9-11). Like a woman in travail, the daughter of Zion will cry out (4:10) "to bring forth," rather, "and break forth." As a stream in floodtime breaks forth and scatters its waters far and wide, so the daughter of Zion, the people of Jerusalem, would have to break forth out of the city and go even to Babylon (v. 10), while the city would be defiled (v. 11), and their judge (collective singular), their kings, be smitten on the cheek, shamefully maltreated. Only a few decades later Manasseh was taken to Babylon in chains (2 Chron. 33:11). On the humiliating treatment of the last kings of Judah read Jer. 22; Shallum (Jehoahaz) Jer. 22:11-12, cp. 2 Chron. 36:1-4; Jehoiakim, Jer. 22:13-19; Jehoiachin, or Coniah, 22:24-28; Zedekiah, Jer. 52:4-11. God would give up His people, they would become subjects of foreign rulers, and this condition would continue "until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth." That is of course not the Church, as rationalistic interpreters tell us. Here is a manifest reference to a prophecy spoken by Micah's contemporary, Isaiah: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son" (Is. 7:14), liter-

ally, Behold, the virgin pregnant and giving birth, *yoledet*, to a son! And Micah says: Until the one giving birth has given birth, *yoledah yaladah*. In Bethlehem was to be born the Woman's Seed, the Virgin's Son, Immanuel; and while the oppression of Israel was to last until His birth, this Child was to be the Ruler of Israel; He was to be that Shiloh in whom the scepter would again be in the hand of Judah (Gen. 49:10). By this Child born in Bethlehem, near the tower of the flock, the tower Edar (Gen. 35:21), the first dominion, the Davidic dynasty, the kingdom, shall come from Bethlehem to the daughter of Jerusalem (Micah 4:8), the Church of God, the Church of Jesus Christ. As Jerusalem owed its royal glory to the man David, born at Bethlehem, so the Jerusalem of the New Testament (Gal. 4:26), the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), the Church of the first-born written in heaven (Heb. 12:22 f.), owes all its glory to the Child born of a human mother, a virgin, at Bethlehem Ephratah, a Child whose goings out are from of old, from everlasting. O wondrous Child of Bethlehem!

"Then the remnant of His brethren shall return unto the children of Israel." The "remnant," *yeter*, frequently denotes something besides what is mentioned in the context, and sometimes is translated "rest" (Judg. 7:6; 1 Sam. 13:12; 2 Sam. 10:10). Compare also the frequent expression "the rest of the acts," etc. (1 Kings 11:41; etc.) Sometimes it is translated "residue" (Is. 44:19; Jer. 27:19; etc.). Besides the "Children of Israel," besides the reunited nation returning out of exile (cp. Is. 11:13; Jer. 3:18; Hos. 1:10), brethren of the Messiah according to the flesh, there is mentioned here another company of brethren, not according to the common descent from Abraham, but by faith in the Gospel—those Gentiles that according to the prophecy would join Israel; those nations that in the last days shall go up to the mountain of the Lord, there to learn His ways and to walk in His paths (Micah 4:2-5; Is. 2:2-4; cp. Hos. 1:10; Is. 11:10-12; Eph. 2:11-22; Rom. 9:24-26; 1 Pet. 2:10). The Ruler of Israel is not ashamed to call these Gentile nations "His brethren" (Heb. 2:11; cp. Matt. 12:50; John 10:16; 12:51-52). What an honor to be acknowledged as a brother of Him whose goings forth are from of old and from everlasting, whose divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness

and exceeding great and precious promises, that by Him we might be made partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3-4), being transformed into the image of the Father, our Creator, and of the Son, our blessed Redeemer! Not only converted Israel, but converted Gentiles of every race and every nation will be made brethren of the Ruler of eternity.

V. 4. "And He shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord, His God." His strength is that of the Lord, for He is the Mighty God (Is. 9:7). His is a strength that no man can resist, a strength tested to the utmost in the great battle of Golgotha, where in the midst of hell He stood unconquered, unconquerable. Though forsaken of God, yet He did not forsake His God, but adhered to Him in the divine strength of His almighty love. And three days later He stands victorious on the grave, the Conqueror of all the host of hell. "In the majesty of the name of Jehovah, His God." As God, He is Jehovah. As one born of a human mother, the Lord is His God, with whom nevertheless — a marvel beyond human understanding — He, Immanuel, is one, the connecting Link between God and man, uniting divinity and humanity in one person. "The majesty of the name of the Lord," this phrase reminds us of such passages as Phil. 2:9-11; Eph. 1:20-23; Rev. 4:6-14.

This power and this majesty the Messiah employs in feeding, in shepherding, His people. He is, indeed, the Shepherd-King. In Him are combined the royal power and majesty of Deity and the Shepherd's tender love. He is the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us. What marvelous honor bestowed upon human beings, frail, sinful, mortal, to have such a King! (Hymn 94:2.)

This Shepherd-King stands, He does not lie down. He neither slumbers nor sleeps. He is pictured here not even as sitting on His throne of glory. No, He stands, stands with all the power of the majesty of the Lord God. Yet He stands as the loving Shepherd of His sheep, watching with eyes of love every sheep and lamb of His flock, constantly on the look-out lest an enemy disturb its peace; a superhuman task, yet a work of love with Him.

"And they shall abide." "Abide," *yashab*, is used here in the sense of dwelling quietly, safely, in full security. (Cp. Jer. 17:25; Zech. 9:5; Is. 11:4-9.) That is not a false security.

It is a safety and security far more reliable than any human scheme of health insurance, old-age pension, or social security can possibly guarantee; for there stands the Shepherd, who now, after having been exalted far above all heavens, "shall be great unto the ends of the earth." The iron fist of Assyria and Babylon held all the world in fearsome subjection. The power of Rome was respected throughout the world, so that its humblest citizen could be sure of its protection (cp. Acts 16:37-40; 22:25-29; 23:26-35). Yet, that is as nothing compared with the power of the Shepherd-King of His Church, yes, with the power of even the humblest member of His flock. For here is the King clad in the royal robes of the strength of the Lord, vested with the imperial garment of the majesty of the name of the Lord, the omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal Jehovah. Such is our King.

V. 5. "And this Man shall be the Peace." Literally, "This One is Peace." At His birth the angels sang, "Peace on earth." And the nature of the peace that He brought to the world is reflected in the name announced by the angel before His birth and given to Him on the day of His circumcision: "Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21; Luke 2:14; cp. v. 29). He it is that fulfilled Isaiah 53; He it is whose blood cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7; 2:2): "through whom we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1); who is our Peace, not only because He has made of both Jews and Gentiles one, having broken down the middle wall of partition between us, but who also abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the Law of commandments by fulfilling every iota of God's Law; who reconciled both Jews and Gentiles unto God by the Cross, having slain the enmity thereby; who came and preached peace to those which were afar off and to them that were nigh; through whom we all have access by one Spirit unto the Father, so that we are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, at peace with God and in full enjoyment of the rich blessings of our Father's home. (Cp. Eph. 2:15-17; Hymn 94:1.) Every believer, no matter how black his sin, may sing Hymn 37:13-15.

"The Assyrian! When he shall come into our land and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against

him seven shepherds and eight principal men." Very emphatically the name of the enemy stands at the very beginning of the sentence. Assyria at the time of Micah was the arch-enemy of Israel and Judah (cp. 2 Kings 15:19-29; 16:7-12; 17:3-6, 23-27; 18:7-19:37). Micah mentions the enemy threatening the very existence of the people of God in his day as a type of all future enemies of the New Testament Church of God: Rome, imperial and papal; Rationalism, Modernism, Atheism, Communism, all that vast host of Gog and Magog, gathered by the prince of darkness, covering the breadth of the earth, compassing the camp of the saints about, marshaling their forces against the beloved city, the Church of Jesus Christ (Rev. 20:8-9). "Assyria"—the very name struck terror to the heart of every believer. Just as the hearts of the believers are filled with forebodings of disaster at the very thought of the vast host of enemies fighting against the Christian Church in our day and age. Yet, though devils all the world shall fill, all eager to devour us, we need not tremble, we need fear no ill, for there is our Ruler, the virgin-born Ruler of Israel. He stands ready to defend His Church.

"Then we shall raise against him seven shepherds and eight men." Like the three and four (Amos 1:3-11), the four, five (Is. 17:6), the six and seven (Job 5:19; Prov. 6:16), so the seven and eight here (also Eccl. 11:2) are not to be regarded mathematically, but as rhetorical figures, used to express an indefinite number, with or without the connotation of intensification. While sometimes the figure denotes a scanty measure, two, at the most three, e. g., Is. 17:6, here, as in Amos 1:3-11, it is used in the sense of *satis superque*, enough and more. Shepherds are the spiritual leaders of the people, clerical and laic; leaders not like the false shepherds so bitterly denounced by Micah (ch. 3:1-11) and later by Jeremiah (ch. 23:1, 2, 9-32), but leaders who are at the same time "principal men," princes of, or among, men; the same construction found Is. 29:9, "the poor among men"; Prov. 15:20; 21:20, "a foolish man," literally, a fool of man or among men. Compare the expression "a prince of a fellow." These leaders shall oppose the enemies of the Church, ruled by Christ.

V. 6. "And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof." Nimrod was one of the earliest empire builders, the beginning

of whose kingdom was Babylon (Gen. 10:8-10), extending throughout Shinar, Sumeria, northwest of the Persian Gulf along the lower course of the Euphrates. From Babylon Nimrod went northward to Asshur, Assyria, and built Nineveh and its sister cities (Gen. 10:11-12). Nimrod is father or founder of both Babylon and Assyria, who later became in inverse order the archenemies of Israel and types of all Satanic powers opposing the Church of God (Eph. 2:2, 3). Refrain-like the words "when he shall come, etc.," are repeated from v. 5, testifying to the terror caused by the Assyrian invasion of Judah. The Prophet still hears the tramp of the soldiers, the beating of the horses' hoofs, the rattling of the chariots as in endless numbers they cover the land. So the believing child of God still shudders, his heart still beats with terror at the memory of trials and tribulations, of fierce battles against Satan's temptations, of attacks which almost robbed him of his faith and salvation. It is indeed a mighty enemy that opposes the Christian Church and its individual members. Yet it is not a hopeless battle, thank God! Not only will they repulse the attacks of the enemy, not only will they defend the Church against the inroads of its many adversaries, they will also take the offensive, attack the enemy, invade his territory, lay it waste "in the entrances thereof," their gates, all their cities. By the taking of the gates the city was taken. They will destroy their evil influence and liberate those that were held in the bondage of sin and unbelief. The weapons of their warfare are, of course, not carnal, but spiritual, forged by the Lord God Himself (Eph. 6:11-20), and on that very account mighty to succeed in an undertaking impossible to mere human means and endeavors (2 Cor. 10:1-6).

Who are these leaders, these princely men? We think of men like Paul and his associates, the other Apostles; of Athanasius, Augustine, Jerome, Wycliffe, Luther and his aides, Tyndale, L. Harms, Walther, Krauth. We think of the many missionaries among savage nations who wrought and labored and suffered and died in their battle against devilish superstitions and hellish fanaticism and Satanic hatred; of those missionaries who may be working in highly cultured centers of learning, trying to bring men to Christ to whom the Gospel of Christ is folly and an offense, an insult to their superior learning and wisdom. We think of the many pastors who

faithfully feed the flock assigned to them by the great Shepherd and by word and deed battle against the modern trends of thought, the natural sluggishness of the Christian's flesh, the ever-increasing danger of worldliness threatening the very existence of the Church. We think of the teachers in our parish and Sunday schools who train the future generation to take over the battle against the kingdom of darkness. We think of the many consecrated laymen who, without denying one iota of their Christian faith and conviction, use their financial and civic and political influence to guard and promote the interest of the Church of Christ. We think of all those Christian husbands and wives who by the effective power of a Christian life and example have gained their spouse for Christ's kingdom. And since the numbers seven and eight are not mathematical numbers, we think last, but not least, of all those Christian parents who make their homes Christian homes, powerful bulwarks against the invading forces of sin and Satan, effective arsenals and recruiting stations for willing, courageous, consecrated soldiers of Christ, carrying the banners of the Babe of Bethlehem, the Ruler of the world, to the ends of the earth.

"Thus shall He deliver us." It is the Church that raises seven shepherds and eight princely men; the Church that fights the battle of the Lord; that carries the banner of their divine Ruler to all nations. Yet the Church confesses: With might of ours can naught be done. It is not their own efforts, their own wisdom, experience, psychological insight, progressiveness, eloquence, or any other human skill or aptitude that grants to the believers success and victory. Their loss were soon effected, were they to rely on their own strength. Paul plants, Apollos waters, yet the Lord grants success. The Church labors, and battles, and preaches, and evangelizes, yet the Lord *delivers*, saves, gives them victories and success. They are only His instruments, powerless in themselves (2 Cor. 3:5), yet able to do all through the power of that Child born at Bethlehem, the Ruler of Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. To Him all glory!

In contrast to the twofold mention of the coming of the Assyrian into the land (vv. 5-6) there follows a twofold presentation of the Church's victory over the enemy (vv. 7-8).

V. 7. "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of

many people as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men." "Remnant of Jacob." The name Jacob instead of Israel is used purposely here to denote the weakness, sinfulness, and unworthiness of the people addressed. "Remnant," *sheerith*, occurs five times in Micah. Ch. 2:17 it denotes that "little flock" of believers in contrast to those who, while named the house of Jacob (2:7), are only outwardly Jews (Rom. 2:28); have no lot or part in the congregation of the Lord (2:5; cp. Acts 8:21). In ch. 4:7 God promises to make her "that halted" (the same word used of Jacob, Gen. 32:31 [Hebrew, v. 32] and occurring only once more, Zeph. 3:19), a "remnant," *sheerith*, that shall be a strong nation, over which the Lord shall reign forever (v. 7 b). In ch. 7:18 we are told that the Lord "passeth by the transgression of the remnant of His heritage," etc. There can be no doubt that the remnant are the elect children of God (cp. Is. 10:20-22; 11:11-16; Rom. 9:27). Jacobs they are, utterly unworthy (Gen. 27:1-36); yet by the grace of God His chosen people (Gen. 32:10), the remnant according to the election of grace (Rom. 11:5; 9:6 b-12).

This remnant is found "in the midst of many people" scattered throughout every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." And they are placed there for a purpose. They are, says Micah, "as a dew from the Lord, as the showers upon the grass." "Dew," occurring some 36 times, is "the night mist of the summer months in Palestine, which represents the condensed moisture brought by westerly winds from the Mediterranean and cooled by the night air. As rain does not fall from the beginning of May to the latter part of October, the night mist supplies to the parched vegetation moisture abundant enough to sustain the summer crops." (*Micah with Commentary*, M. L. Margolis, p. 55.)

"Dew" symbolizes both material blessings (Gen. 27:28-39; Deut. 33:13, 28; Hag. 1:10; Zech. 8:12) and spiritual gifts, particularly the life-giving, life-restoring, life-preserving power of God and His Word (Deut. 32:2; Ps. 133:3; Is. 26:19; Hos. 14:5). "Showers," *rebibim*, invariably are symbolic of God's blessings. The word occurs six times: as a material blessing (Ps. 65:10; Jer. 3:3; 14:22); as symbolic of spiritual vivification (Deut. 32:2; Ps. 72:6; Micah 5:7). The elect of God, weak,

sinful Jacobs, despised by the men of wisdom and power of this world (1 Cor. 1:26-28), nevertheless are the life of the world. They are in possession of what the world needs, the life-giving and preserving Gospel of the Babe of Bethlehem. Of Him they testify, His Peace they proclaim, His kingdom they advertise by their words (2 Kings 5:1-3; Acts 8:4-12, 27 ff.; 11:19-26), and by their lives (Matt. 5:14-16; Phil. 2:15; 1 Pet. 2:12; 3:1-2). This testimony comes down upon the barren hearts of their unbelieving fellow men. Like showers from heaven, it mellows the hard soil of their hearts and changes their hearts from thickets of thistles and thorns to beautiful gardens of the Lord, a delight to God and men. This dew is a "dew of the Lord." It owes its life-giving power not to the wisdom and skill and eloquence of man, but to God's almighty grace alone. As the dew and the showers tarry (wait) not for man and wait not for the sons of men, as they look not to man for their life and existence, nor wait for the command of man to come or stay away, so it is indeed Paul that labors, that plants, and Apollos that waters, but it is God that giveth the increase (1 Cor. 3:6; 1 Cor. 15:9-10).

What seemed like the tragic end of the glory that was Israel, the exile, the scattering of the nation that God had chosen as His own, shall be the fructifying dew, the life-giving showers, that will cause a new Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), far outnumbering the old Israel after the flesh, to sprout from the barren soil of pagandom, the Church of the Shepherd-King.

V. 8. "And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep; who, if he go through, both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver." Refrainlike the Prophet repeats the first clause of v. 7, adding only "among the Gentiles." The kingdoms of Nimrod, Assyria and Babylon (v. 6), are frequently compared to lions and young lions because of their strength, swiftness, and ferocity (Jer. 4:7; 5:6; 25:38; 49:19); so also the enemies of believers in general (Ps. 17:12). Here the term is applied to the believers. Feeble Jacob, the playball of the nations, God's Church, afflicted, tossed with tempest, seemingly a woman forsaken and refused (Is. 54:6, 11), shall become a powerful lion, breaking into the folds

of Nimrod — Satan, depriving him of his sheep, treading down his strongholds of unbelief and sin and superstition, delivering those who had been held captive by the prince of darkness, making constantly new inroads on his vast empire, gaining constantly more territory; a victorious Church whose individual members are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:33-39; 1 Cor. 15:55-57). And while the Gospel of the virgin-born Shepherd-King, the Babe of Bethlehem, for many will be as life-giving dew and vivifying showers, a savor of life unto life, to others who steadfastly refuse to give up their opposition it will become a savor of death unto death (2 Cor. 2:15-16). He that believes not is damned (Mark 16:16), is trodden down, hopelessly lost, one whom "none can deliver" (John 3:36). And who is sufficient for these things? Not Jacobs, not mortal men, be they ever so wise and powerful, but only the dew of the Lord, the Gospel of the Man who is Peace (2 Cor. 2:14).

Micah's prophecy, written 700 years before the birth of Christ, is a true Christmas Gospel, the New Testament good tidings of great joy in the language of the Old Testament. The Old Testament believers looked forward in hopeful anticipation to that wondrous birth at Bethlehem to which after 1,900 years we look back in joyous faith and grateful adoration.

We offer a few suggestions on the homiletical treatment of this rich text. In Psalm 136 the Psalmist praises the everlasting mercy of the Lord, who alone doeth great wonders, and points to a number of His wondrous works. Yet the greatest of all wonders is that celebrated by Christendom at Christmas time. *"His Name Shall Be Called Wonderful."* (1) Wondrous is His person, v. 2; (2) Wondrous is His work (establishment of peace with God, v. 5 a; deliverance from enemies, v. 6 b; gathering His sheep, v. 3 b; feeding and protecting them, v. 4; giving them shepherds, v. 5 b); (3) Wondrous are His subjects (the remnant of Jacob, weak, sinful beings are changed into life-giving dew, v. 7; victorious conquerors over Satan's kingdom, vv. 8, 5 a, 6 b; in the power of their King, v. 6 b). — *The Ruler Born at Bethlehem.* (1) His marvelous origin; (2) His royal rule; (3) His willing subjects. — *The Babe of Bethlehem, the Prince of Peace.* (1) The nature of this peace. If He had come to establish political,

social peace, He would have been the greatest failure. He brings a better peace; (2) His qualification for this work (as God-Man He can bear our sins, fulfill the Law, procure righteousness, earn peace with God). The text offers ample material for several sermons: on Christmas Eve, "The Marvelous Birth"; on Christmas Day, "His Royal Rule"; on Second Christmas Day, "His Willing Subjects." Or the Second Christmas Day may be devoted to missions: *The Christ Child and Missions*. (1) The mission workers (all Christians, the remnant of Jacob, delivered by Him who is Peace); (2) The Mission Field ("unto the ends of the earth," v. 4); "in the midst of many people," v. 7). (Call attention to congregational, District, synodical mission work and opportunities still beckoning). (3) Mission methods (the Word of God, Law and Gospel); (4) Success of missions (vv. 3 b, 5 b, 6 a, 7, 8).

