

## Study 4 - Raise us to thy glorious throne



Pieter Bruegel, The Good Shepherd, 1616

### Starting Point...

4. By thine own eternal spirit  
rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all sufficient merit,  
raise us to thy glorious throne.

### Key verse...

‘But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,  
though you are small among the clans of Judah,  
out of you will come for me  
one who will be ruler over Israel,  
whose origins are from of old,  
from ancient times.’ (Micah 5:2)

### By thine own eternal spirit...

(Read Micah 5:2-5a )

This chapter begins with a call to arms for a Jerusalem under siege, but what swiftly follows is a statement of hope. Ephrathah is the ancient name of Bethlehem and identifies it as the town in which David was born (1 Samuel 17:12), as well as being a connection between the messianic King and David.

This new ruler, says the prophet, will be one whose activities lie in the distant past (the word can mean eternity), but who is coming at some future time. Micah’s words

appear to speak of a supernatural figure. Until that time, when ‘she who is in labour bears a son’ and there is a restoration of the family of Israel from exile, the nation will remain estranged from God.

Micah describes the kingly reign of the Messiah in familiar shepherding terms, but his reign will reach to the ends of the earth, a source of peace, echoing Isaiah’s description of the child who would become ‘Prince of Peace’ (Isaiah 9:6).

## Discussion...

Q) Israel had been without a Davidic king since the fall of Jerusalem in 586BC, which Micah prophesies about in the late 8th century BC. How easy must it have been for a people hearing these words read over many centuries, to maintain hope in a messianic King?

Q) Where do you see the coming of Jesus within these words?

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## Rule in all our hearts alone...

(Read Psalm 80:1-7)

Here is God the Shepherd again and a plea that the people, probably the northern tribes, might, with divine help, find safety as in the past. These are God's people and only he can 'restore' them as they come to him humbly in prayer, seeking salvation.

Historically, there is some evidence of an increase in population around Jerusalem, which may have been an influx of refugees fleeing the Assyrian army.

The language of the psalmist is both poetic and revealing, as he accuses God of feeding

the people with the 'bread of tears' and making them drink tears by the bowlful.

There is desperation in these words, knowing that these people are a cause of God's anger, and worthy of judgement, and the author now asks how much longer this anger will last. The people seek restoration and forgiveness, and for God to once more rule in their lives and hearts.

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## Discussion...

Q) The picture of a divine Shepherd was one that the people of Israel could relate to. Is that still an image that works today, or is there an alternative occupation that might work today as an illustration of how God leads and feeds his people?

Q) This is the song of a people who are at their wits' end, desperate for their situation to turn around. Can it have relevance for today, and how does it fit into the Advent story?

**Txxrwlv#**

'The real evidence for Jesus and Christianity is in how Jesus and the Christianity based on him manifest themselves in the lives of practicing Christians.' (Lionel Blue)

'To perceive Christmas through its wrappings becomes more difficult with every year.' (E. B. White)

## By thine all sufficient merit...

(Read Hebrews 10:5-10)

This passage is part of a longer treatise on worship and sacrifice. The writer tells us that because the Levitical sacrifices under the old covenant were powerless to deal with sin, with offerings having to be made year after year, something new had to be established, and he quotes from Psalm 40 words that he sees as coming from Christ and explaining the incarnation.

It was not the sacrifices that displeased God, but that they were not being offered in the right spirit. What God wanted was obedience to His will, and the nation's

history showed how difficult that was to achieve.

Therefore, says the author, Christ came into the world, and through his obedience to God's will and his sacrifice on the Cross, a new covenant was established whereby all might become holy, set apart, through that one sacrificial offering. Nothing needed adding to that act, no repetition was necessary and as Jesus said himself, 'It is finished!' (John 19:30) The old had gone, the new begun.

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## Discussion...

Q) How difficult is it to sum up, in a few words, the problems of an old Covenant that Israel struggled to keep, and tie it in with all that Jesus did? Do you think the author achieved his aim?

Q) Is sacrifice, in part, still necessary for believers, and what should our offering be?

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## Raise us to thy glorious throne...

(Read Luke 1: 46-55)

The words of Mary's song mirror those sung centuries earlier by Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1-10) and its major theme is a reversal of the powerful and the humble in society, and amongst the nations who have oppressed Israel.

The song is full of Old Testament phrases and shows Mary's deep knowledge of Scripture, which, though not unusual, does perhaps show the pious nature of the one chosen to be the mother of the Lord.

Mary is humble enough not to think herself as worthy of this honour, but being chosen by God in this way is reason enough for a song of praise.



Mary begins with an expression of joy and an acknowledgement of God's enduring interest in her life, despite her low social status. She remembers all that God has done in the past, not just for her but for generations past.

From the time of Abraham, God has been with his people, fed the hungry, sent the rich away empty-handed, exalted the

humble, and brought down rulers from their thrones. The inference in Mary's words is that having done all this in the past, God will continue that same work through the life of her son.

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## Discussion...

Q) The traditional Nativity play is one that has Mary (and Joseph) at its heart. How important is our use of this song within the liturgy of worship, in remembering her obedience and joy in accepting God's call and challenge?

Q) Is there a verse that speaks into your own call to follow?

Q) How revolutionary are her words, and how much a part of their fulfilment are we?

Q) What for you is the message of Advent that this world needs to hear?

Q) Look again at the last verse of Charles Wesley's hymn and consider its place in the Advent story.

## Let's pray...

For our neighbourhood, town or city, and a world that needs to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ!