

Jesus: A Strong and Loving Shepherd

Advent Week 2

Scripture: Micah 5:2-5a

Sermon Series: *Waiting and Watching*

Topic: Jesus, Advent

Introduction

When you hear the name "Jesus," what are the first qualities that come into your mind?

Father, we have come to worship your King. Help us to see His glory.

Today is week 2 of Advent. Advent is a season of waiting and watching. We are waiting to celebrate together the first coming of Jesus and we are watching for second coming.

We look back to the wonderful day of his birth, and we look forward with eager longing to the day when he comes again "on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."¹

The season of Advent focuses our attention on Jesus. Today, if God is gracious, we will see Jesus as the *strong and loving shepherd* spoken of by the prophet Micah.

How do we know that Jesus is the one spoken of by the prophet Micah? The first reason is because of the location of Jesus' birth.



Messiah: Born in Bethlehem

In Matthew's gospel, when "three wise men from the east" showed up in Jerusalem asking "where is he who has been born king of the Jews, for we have seen his star and have come to worship him?"² then Herod the king and "all Jerusalem with him"³ were deeply troubled. How

¹ Matthew 24:30; Mark 13:26.

² Matthew 2:1-2.

³ Matthew 2:3.

had news of the birth of a new Jewish king reached so far east, but failed to be known in downtown Jerusalem? If a new rival to the throne had been born, then Herod most certainly wanted to know.

⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. **Matthew 2:4** (ESV)

Herod understood the one the wise men sought, the one “*born king of the Jews*,”⁴ to be the same as “*the Christ*” (Χριστός Christos). The ‘Christ’ is the one “*divinely anointed*”⁵ by God to fulfill his promise to David⁶ and bring in “*the promised eschatological reign.*”⁷ The chief priests and scribes answered Herod saying, “*In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet...*”⁸ then they quoted the very passage of Scripture that was just read to you.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to be ruler in Israel...
Micah 5:2 (ESV)

The prophet **Micah** lived from around 750—700 B.C. He was contemporary of Isaiah. Through him God announced the birthplace of “*one who is to be ruler in Israel.*” This “*ruler*” was understood to be the Messiah. Thus, the birthplace of God’s Messiah would be Bethlehem in Judea.



Bethlehem has the hometown of king David. It was a small and insignificant town. Nothing great or noteworthy had happened there, except that it was the birthplace of David, who became king. Remember that even David was small and insignificant. He was the youngest of seven⁹ boys and when Samuel was sent to anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king, David wasn’t even invited to the gathering. God often chooses small and insignificant people to do great and mighty things, because this reminds us that he alone is worthy of all glory and without Him we can do nothing.

⁴ Matthew 2:2.

⁵ Chris Kugler, “Messiah,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

⁶ 2 Samuel 7:12-16; Psalms 2:2; 105:15.

⁷ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 61.

⁸ Matthew 2:5.

⁹ 1 Chronicles 2:15.

God had promised David that Messiah would be one of his descendants. Through Micah God revealed that His Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Thus, if you wanted to see the Messiah, then you'd better watch the babies born in Bethlehem. There was no question about this. The chief priests and scribes knew this. Herod and the three wise men now knew this. And we—and all who seek the Messiah—now know this as well.

It is interesting that only the three wise men then act on this prophetic information. These three alone go to Bethlehem to see if they can find the baby, the one to whom the star was pointing. None of the chief priests nor scribes went with them. They were waiting for Messiah, but not watching for him, while the wise men were both waiting and watching!

Jesus was Born in Bethlehem

And we know that upon their arrival in Bethlehem, they found their way—having been led by the star¹⁰—to the “house”¹¹ in which Joseph, Mary, and the child Jesus were staying (Mt 2:9-10). The arrival of these three wise men was some time “*after Jesus was born in Bethlehem*” (Mt 2:1), up to around two years, for the young family were then living in a “house” and Herod commanded the murder of all boys born in Bethlehem “*who were two years old or under*” (Mt 2:16).

Micah, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit around 700 B.C., explained that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Could he be the Messiah?

Messiah: a Strong Shepherd

Micah reveals more information about Messiah than merely the place of his birth. He also reveals that the Messiah will be like a shepherd, a strong shepherd.

And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth.

Micah 5:4 (ESV)

Messiah: the Strong

The first aspect of the Messiah to see is *the strength of the Messiah*. The Messiah will “*stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD*” (Mic 5:4). This shepherd would be uniquely empowered by the strength of LORD, by strength of Yahweh of Israel. God himself will be the supply of his strength. Yahweh will strengthen him to “stand” and minister to “his flock.”

¹⁰ Matthew 2:9-10.

¹¹ Matthew 2:11.

Was such strength present in the life of Jesus?

Jesus: Strong in the Wilderness

You will recall that before Jesus began his public ministry, being "*full of the Holy Spirit*,"¹² was led into the wilderness for 40 days, "*being tempted by the devil*."¹³ He was tempted the entire 40 days. He did not merely endure three temptations. We are only told of three. He probably endured hundreds, for "*he was tempted in every way as we are*," yet he did not sin.¹⁴

Every day, all day, he was tempted by the devil to disobey his Father. Jesus stood strong against the devil. He stood and he did not fall. The devil threw at him everything he had, and yet, Jesus kept standing. He did not fail nor did he fall. Jesus obeyed the Father every day for forty days while every day he was tempted to disobey. Jesus had faith in God the Father every day for forty days, the same amount of time that the spies of Israel—at least 10 out of 12—had no faith in God while investigating the Promised Land.

Jesus stood strong in the wilderness. He stood strong where other men had not and he continued standing strong against temptation until the day of his death. Jesus stood strong in the strength of LORD and he overcame temptation. He was not depleted by it, but he seems to have increased in power.

Jesus: Strong in the Synagogue

After standing strong against the devil in the wilderness, Jesus "*returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee*"¹⁵ where he stood strong against the Pharisees in the synagogue. When Jesus began his public ministry, he did so in a synagogue in front of a crowd of Israelites. We read about this in Luke 4. In the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth, Jesus was invited to read Scripture and he was handed the scroll of Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and chose to read from chapter 61. Jesus read saying,

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Luke 4:18-19 (ESV)

¹² Luke 4:1.

¹³ Luke 4:2.

¹⁴ And the devil's temptations were not limited to those 40 days in the wilderness, for they resumed some time thereafter. We are told that devil, "*departed from him until an opportune time*" (Luke 4:13). The devil ended the forty days of temptations, but only waited for 'an opportune time' thereafter to attack him again.

¹⁵ Luke 4:14.

After reading this, Jesus sat down and said, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). The strength of Jesus came from "the Spirit of the Lord upon" him. God had "anointed" Jesus with His Holy Spirit to do all that he called him to do; to preach, to heal, to set free, and to bring the Lord's favor. Jesus stood strong in the strength and Spirit of the Lord and he proclaimed good news to the world.

Messiah: the Shepherd

The second aspect of the Messiah to see is that he will be *like a shepherd*. Messiah will "stand and shepherd his flock..." (Mic 5:4). Not only will Messiah be strong, but he will also be like a shepherd. What do shepherds do? At least four things; they lead, feed, protect, and care for their sheep. Was Jesus like a shepherd?

Jesus: The Good Shepherd

Jesus claimed to be like a shepherd. More than that, he claimed to be "the good shepherd." We find this teaching in John 10:1-18. In John's gospel, just a short time before Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, he taught that he alone was "the good shepherd." He described himself this way twice.

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. ¹¹ I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. John 10:10-16 (ESV)

What do good shepherds do? They do at least four things; protect their sheep, provide for them, lead them, and love them. Did Jesus do such things?

1) A Shepherd Protects His Sheep

Sheep have natural enemies. In middle eastern contexts, the primary enemy are **wolves**. However, there are also robbers, rustlers, and false shepherds. In this teaching (in John 10) Jesus addresses them all.

1) The first enemy is "thieves and robbers."

"...that man is a thief and a robber."
John 10:1 (ESV)

"All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them." John 10:8 (ESV)

2) The second enemy is rustlers, strangers who try to steal sheep for themselves.

“A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” John 10:5 (ESV)

3) The third enemy is false shepherds. These are not shepherds, but merely pretenders who are in it for the money.

“He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees... He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.” John 10:12-13 (ESV)

Jesus Protected His Sheep

Jesus protected all of his disciples whom he intended to protect. In the final prayer Jesus prayed before being arrested, he prayed to the Father,

“While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” John 17:12 (ESV)

Jesus protected his eleven disciples, whom he had chosen to endure through the attack of the guards in the Garden of Gethsemane¹⁶ and through his crucifixion. And Jesus promises to do the same for **all** of his disciples who will ever believe in and follow him as God's Son and Messiah.

²⁷ “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰ I and the Father are one.” John 10:27-30 (ESV)

Jesus promises to protect his people. And he will keep his promise. If you trust in Him, then he says to you, “I give you eternal life and you will never perish.” Jesus **will give eternal life** to those who hear his voice and follow him and he promises “they **will never perish!**” In Jesus, the eternal destiny of your soul will be forever safe and secure. Yes, Jesus protects his sheep.

2) Shepherd Provides for His Sheep

The shepherd provides secure rest for the sheep, good pasture, and water. A shepherd would build sheepfolds for their sheep to rest in at night. They would provide for them good green pastures and flowing streams in the daytime. In doing so, he caused his sheep to flourish.

¹⁶ See John 18:9.

Jesus Provides for His Sheep

Jesus does the same for his sheep.

“I am the door [to the sheepfold¹⁷]. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.” **John 10:9** (ESV)

Here Jesus describes himself as the door to the **sheepfold**. A sheepfold was a rock walled pen with only one entrance which keep the sheep safe through the night. The wall protected the sheep from sneaky predators snatching them in the night. The shepherd guarded the doorway into the sheepfold and was able to watch over the sheep and keep them safe at night since they were gathered in one place and not scattered abroad on the ground.

The shepherd also was able to provide **good pasture** for his sheep. He provides the sheep with good food. He knows where green grass is and where **running streams** are. Thus, he provides for their material needs of the sheep. In this way, in a manner of speaking, he gives them life. Jesus does the same.

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” **John 10:10** (ESV)

Jesus gives spiritual life by **rightly teaching the word of God**, for his word is our life.¹⁸ Jesus said, “*The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life*” (Jn 6:63). Peter badly proclaimed to Jesus, “*You have the words of eternal life*” (Jn 6:68).

Jesus not only taught God’s word, but he **gives God’s Holy Spirit**, which is like living water to the soul of mankind.

³⁷ ...Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.” ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given... **John 7:37-39** (ESV)

Jesus provides safe rest for the soul¹⁹, spiritual food, and living water for all who will come to him in faith and trust. Yes, Jesus provides for his sheep.

3) Shepherd Leads His Sheep

The shepherd leads his sheep to green pastures, good water, and safe shelter. Sheep do not find those things on their own. Sheep are so fearful they will run from the noise of running

¹⁷ John 10:1.

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 8:3; 32:47.

¹⁹ See Matthew 11:28-29.

water. They need help finding water and food. The shepherd goes before them and shows them the way to what they need and they follow him. The same goes for Jesus.

“The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice.” **John 10:3-4 (ESV)**

Jesus’ first words to almost all his disciples was, “Follow me.”²⁰ Similarly when Jesus describes himself as “the Good Shepherd,” he shows that he is the leader of his sheep. Yes, Jesus leads his sheep.

4) Shepherd Loves His Sheep

A good shepherd will “care for” his sheep, while a false shepherd, a “hired hand” does not truly care for the sheep.

“He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.” **John 10:13**

Jesus has a specific kind of care in mind. He means love. The kind of love Jesus is talking about is the kind of love that lays down its life for the safety and goodness and salvation of the one he loves. Fives times Jesus mentions this.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd **lays down his life** for the sheep.”
John 10:11 (ESV)

¹⁴ “I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and **I lay down my life** for the sheep.”
John 10:14-15 (ESV)

¹⁷ “For this reason the Father loves me, because **I lay down my life** that I may take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but **I lay it down** of my own accord. I have authority to **lay it down**, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”
John 10:17-18 (ESV)

Five times Jesus makes reference to the fact that he “**lays down his life**.” Jesus does this because he “*cares for the sheep*.” This is another way of saying that he **loves** his sheep. The death of Jesus proves his love for those for whom he died.

“For God loved the world in this way; He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.” **John 3:16 (HCSB)**

²⁰ Matthew 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; Mark 1:17; 2:14; John 1:43; cf. Matthew 10:28; 16:24; 19:21; Mark 8:34; 10:21;

Is Jesus a kind of shepherd who loved his sheep? Yes, Jesus loves his sheep and he proves his love by laying down his life and dying in their place. Jesus chose to die. No one took His life. He willingly surrender it. He allowed himself to be arrested and crucified.

John 19:30 (ESV) When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Jesus chose the very moment of his death. No one took his life from him. He willingly—out of deep love for his people—surrendered his life.

He was too powerful for anyone to take his life. Do you remember what he said to Peter in the Garden of Gethsemane?

"Put your sword away. Do you not know that I could call on my Father right now and he would give me 12 legions of angels? But if I did that then how then would Scripture be fulfilled that say it must happen this way?" (Matthew 26:52)

Do you remember when Jesus said to the guards who came to arrest him, "Who do you seek?" And they said Jesus and then Jesus said, "I am he," and the power of his words knocked them to the ground (John 18:6)? No one took anything from Jesus. He surrendered himself for the sake of those whom he loved.

Conclusion

Micah said the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and then about 700 years later Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Micah said the Messiah would "shepherd his people in the strength of the Lord." Jesus demonstrated the strength of the Lord by standing against temptation and sin and overcoming them. Jesus is the Good Shepherd.

In the strength of the Lord he protects his people from their enemies.

In the strength of the Lord He watches over his sheep while we sleep.

In strength He provides for all the needs of his people.

In the strength of the Lord leads his people into rest, good food, and living water.

But most of all, in the strength of the Lord, He loves his people. He proved that love by laying down his life in order to pay the penalty of our sin. He died so that we could have life.

Jesus is a strong and loving shepherd.

Are you trusting in his strength?

Are you resting in his love?

Discussion Questions

1. What does 'Christ' mean?
2. Read Micah 5:2-5a. In what ways might Jesus be the fulfillment of the description of Messiah given by Micah?
3. How did Micah know Messiah would be born in Bethlehem? Why would this fact have been revealed to Micah?
4. What qualities of Jesus were highlighted in the sermon? Which of them means most to you personally? Explain why.
5. When you think of Jesus, do you think of him as a strong shepherd? If so, in what ways do see him as being strong? If not, why not?
6. If someone were to ask you, How do you know Jesus loves you, how would you respond?
7. In John 10:11-18, what evidence does Jesus give to demonstrate his love for his people? How does this make you feel?
8. In light of this material (i.e. Micah 5:2-4; John 10:1-18), what reasons do you have to worship Jesus? What facts have you learned that would lead you to worship him?
9. What questions do you have?
10. Did you learn anything new? If so, what?