

■ The 65th Word Sharing

● First Reading: Micah 5:1-4

The prophet Micah, who was active in Judah during the same period as Isaiah, proclaims God's salvation filled with hope, foretelling the emergence of the Messiah from Bethlehem to rule Israel. Bethlehem, a small town, is described as the origin of a Messiah whose existence is "from ancient times," hinting at an eternal nature. Before the Messiah's arrival, there will be a temporary dispersion, but the Messiah (Jesus) will be born of a mother and reunite Israel as one nation. The Messiah's reign will be powerful, bringing peace and security, demonstrating God's authority and dominion. The Messiah's salvation will be universal, extending influence worldwide, and the Messiah himself will embody peace (Isaiah 9:6).

The Messiah is not only a bringer of physical peace or the cessation of war but also reconciliation with God and perfect spiritual peace. The term "peace" (Hebrew: shalom) encompasses not just the absence of conflict but also harmony and prosperity. The Messiah provides complete peace.

**【Ephrathah】** Meaning "fertile land," it refers to a clan or family within the tribe of Judah (Ruth 4:11). It is also the ancient name or surrounding area of Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19).

**【Tribe of Judah】** Descendants of Abraham, with Judah being the fourth son of Jacob (Genesis 29:35). From this tribe, King David was born, forming the core of Israel's monarchy and holding a key position in the Messianic lineage (1 Samuel 16).

**【Bethlehem】** Meaning "House of Bread," it is linked to the "Bread of Life" (John 6:35). Located about 8 km south of Jerusalem, it is the birthplace of King David (1 Samuel 16:1; Luke 2:4) and, according to the New Testament, of Jesus, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy (Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1-6). "Bethlehem Ephrathah" distinguishes it from other places with the same name.

● Second Reading: Hebrews 10:5-10

The Letter to the Hebrews, though not definitively attributed to Paul, is a spiritual letter addressing Jewish believers. It emphasizes that sacrifices and offerings of animals under the Old Testament law (Psalm 40:6-8) do not bring true atonement. Only the offering of Jesus' body fulfills God's will and serves as a true redemption. The animal sacrifices of the Old Testament were human-initiated, temporary, and insufficient for eternal atonement. God was not pleased with these incomplete sacrifices (Isaiah 1:11-17; Hosea 6:6).

The Old Testament prophesied Jesus' mission (Isaiah 53). Jesus came to earth to fulfill God's will. In God's plan of salvation, Jesus' single act of self-sacrifice replaced the Old Testament's sacrificial system, offering eternal redemption. Believers who accept Jesus' Gospel (death, resurrection, and teachings) are fully cleansed (forgiven of original sin) and become righteous before God. They are called to live as holy people pleasing to God (1 Peter 1:15-16). After baptism, forgiveness of sins requires repentance, confessing one's sins (1 John 1:9), and striving to become more like Jesus (Romans 12:1-2). Forgiveness is also received through the Our Father prayer (Matthew 6:12) and forgiving others (Matthew 6:12).

● Gospel Reading: Luke 1:39-45

After the Annunciation, when the angel Gabriel told Mary she would conceive the Savior (Luke 1:36), she learned of Elizabeth's (her relative's) pregnancy. Out of a desire to share in Elizabeth's joy, Mary traveled to greet her (a journey of about 80 km, taking several days). Upon their meeting, the child in Elizabeth's womb (John the Baptist, Jesus' forerunner) leaped, sensing Jesus' presence through the Holy Spirit. (The Holy Spirit would later dwell permanently in believers after Pentecost, John 14:16-17.)

Elizabeth recognized the child Mary carried as the Savior and humbly expressed gratitude for Mary's visit. Mary, in

faith, trusted God's plan and responded, "I am the Lord's servant; may it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38), receiving God's blessing.

Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit, blessed Mary. Their meeting highlights the importance of mutual encouragement and recognizing God's grace.

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