

Grace, mercy, and peace be with you from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father.

² *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting.”* ³ *Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel.* ⁴ *And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth;* ⁵ *and this One shall be peace.*

Text: Micah 5:2-5a A 12-16-18 3rd Sun. in Advent 2 Cor. 4:3-6 Mt. 1:18-25 Ps. 72 Resp. Ps. 85
Hymns: 102, 647, 103, 646

“HEAVENLY PEACE”

Dear fellow believers in the Christchild,

Simon and Garfunkel made a recording of “Silent Night” in which, soon after they’ve begun singing, they also play a recording of a news report (including news of murder and war). The volume of the news report quickly becomes the same as the volume of “Silent Night.” As the song comes to an end with “sleep in heavenly peace,” the implication is, “There is no ‘heavenly peace.’”

Many people in the world express a longing for peace. With all the ‘bad news’ in the world, and the problem each of us has in life, we can sometimes feel a lack of inner peace. So where is there “heavenly peace”?

Our text is from the Old Testament book of Micah. Listen to the following phrases from Micah, describing the political and spiritual condition of the people of Judah, and see if there’s anything we can relate to. *“You rulers ... hate good and love evil”* (3:1-2), *“abhor justice and twist everything that is straight”* (3:9, NASB). *“Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe”* (3:11, NASB). *“Her priests instruct for a price, and her prophets divine for money”* (3:11, NASB); that is, most of the priests and prophets were constantly trying to get peoples’ money for personal gain. *“The prophets ... lead My people astray”* (3:5, NASB). *“Yet they lean on the LORD and say, ‘Is not the LORD among us?’”* (3:11). Most of the priests and prophets taught the people error and immorality as if it was God’s Word and God approved of it. Micah also speaks of *“the sins of the house of Israel”* – the overall immorality, insincere lip service to God, and worship of false gods among most of the people.

The Lord brings up the same kinds of things in many of the books of the Old Testament, showing that these were recurring problems throughout the history of His Old Testament people. We see these same kinds of things going on today. As the Bible says, *“There is nothing new under the sun”* (Ec. 1:9, NASB). We certainly agree with Simon and Garfunkel that there’s a lot of ‘bad news’ in the world.

The root cause of our problems in life is sin. It’s not only the sins of evil rulers and crooked politicians and false teachers. It’s your sins and my sins and everyone else’s sins, going all the way back to Adam and Eve. God originally made our world perfect, but the sin of our human race corrupted it and made it what it is. And because of sin there are lots of problems in life that can take away our sense of peace.

Micah prophesied, *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”* God gave us the cure for sin when He sent His Son, Jesus, born in the small town of Bethlehem.

The majority of Micah’s fellow Jews refused to listen to God, and continued in their sinful, unrepentant ways. As a result Micah told them, *“[God] shall give [you] up.”* God would allow the Babylonians to defeat them and take them into captivity (4:10). God eventually allowed many of the Jews to return home from Babylon. But because of the unbelief of future generations of Jews God again allowed them to be defeated and ruled over by other nations.

Not all of Micah’s fellow Jews had turned away from God. To all who would listen Micah prophesied of *“the time that she who is in labor has given birth;”* – of the future when God’s Son, Jesus Christ, was born of the virgin Mary. Micah directed the people then, and he directs us now, with all of the problems we have in this world to find what we truly need in Jesus.

When we sin and suffer the consequences, the solution is to come to Jesus in repentance and receive His forgiveness. When this sinful world causes us problems, the solution is to come to Jesus with our worry and stress and fear, and rely on Him for strength and help. *“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden,”* Jesus invites us, *“and I will give you rest. ...rest for your souls”* (Mt. 11:28, 29b).

Speaking of the coming Savior Micah says, *“He shall stand and feed His flock.”* Micah refers to everyone who believes in Jesus as Jesus’ *“flock,”* picturing the loving, caring attitude of Jesus, our Good Shepherd, toward us, His sheep. With the problems we face because of the sin in ourselves and the sin in the world, what a comfort it is to know that Jesus is our Good Shepherd and we are His dear sheep. Jesus says *“I am the Good Shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own”* (Jn. 10:14).

“I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd gives His life for the sheep” (Jn. 10:11). John says, *“In this the love of God was [shown] toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation”* (the satisfactory payment) *“for our sins”* (1 Jn. 4:9-10). Our sins had to be paid for. But so that no one would have to be punished for his sins in hell, God sent His Son on that first Christmas to save us. Because Jesus loves us so much He allowed Himself to be punished for our sins on the cross. Jesus’ death has taken away our sins, and we’re saved!

Micah says about Jesus, *“He shall feed His flock ...; and they shall abide.”* Jesus says, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me”* (Jn. 10:27). Jesus feeds us with His Word, giving us the comfort and strength we need to *“abide”* – to keep going – in the midst of all the ‘bad news’ in life.

Micah says, *“The remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel.”* When at different times the Jewish people were defeated and taken into captivity, most of them never returned home. So Micah wasn’t speaking of the Jewish nation – physical Israel. He was speaking of spiritual Israel – the New Testament Church in which Jesus brings people from all nations to believe in Him. Speaking of Jesus Micah says, *“He shall be great to the ends of the earth.”* In God’s gift of His Son He sent salvation to the whole world!

Micah prophesied, *“And this One shall be peace.”* Jesus assures us, *“Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven”* (Mt. 9:2). Jesus forgives all of our sins and takes away all of our guilt, giving us peace. Forgiveness in the Savior who would come gave Micah and the other believing Jews peace. Forgiveness in the Savior who has come gives us peace.

How could Micah and the other believing Jews be at peace in the midst of all of their people’s problems? How can we be at peace in the midst of all our own problems, and all of our country’s problems, and all the other problems and ‘bad news’ in life? “That’s easy,” we think. “My plan is to dwell on the problems and ‘bad news’ and worry about them and be angry and afraid.” Of course we don’t actually say that. But isn’t that what we often do? Jesus asks us, *“Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?”* (Mt. 6:27, NIV). *“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand”* (Is. 41:10, NASB). *“Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret – it leads only to evil”* (Ps. 37:5). *“In Me you ... have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world”* (Jn. 16:33). Peace isn’t the absence of problems and ‘bad news.’ Peace is Jesus’ presence and help in the midst of problems and ‘bad news.’ Paul urges us, *“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! ... The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”* Don’t dwell on your

problems, and on ‘bad news.’ Rejoice in the Lord always. He is always with you. Talk to Him about what’s troubling you. Literally count your blessings, and thank and praise God for them. The result will be, Paul says, that *“the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus”* (Philip. 4:4-7). The more we do this, the better we’re able to be at peace.

When Jesus takes us to heaven He will give us perfect peace forever. *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us”* (Ro. 8:18). *“And God will wipe away every tear from [our] eyes”* (Rev. 7:17b).

Like Simon and Garfunkel, most people don’t understand what “heavenly peace” is. Micah reminds us, *“This One”* Jesus – *“shall be peace.”* In His manger, cross, and empty tomb, in His love and forgiveness, in His presence in our lives, in His help and strength, in the home He has prepared for us in heaven Jesus gives us “heavenly peace.”

Silent night! Holy night!
All is calm, all is bright,
Round yon Virgin Mother and Child.
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace. Amen.