**ADVENT 1, NOV. 27/22, Jesus has an Appointment with You and Me, Mic. 5:2-5, Mt. 1**

 Last week we considered the faith of a foreign woman. It was the story of Ruth, Naomi & Boaz. It has a beautiful emphasis on God-like love. Naomi’s daily walk with God persuaded Ruth to follow the 1 true God & leave behind her Moabite God. We were led to vividly understand the precarious & vulnerable state of the foreigner, the alien, the stranger among us. In Boaz, who was the kinsman-redeemer for Ruth, we saw glimpses of Jesus, our redeemer & king. We were reminded of the way of graciousness, generosity, kindness & joy that God demonstrated in Boaz that God wants infused into our character. And finally we saw that “God works all things together for good for those who love Him & are called according to His purpose” (Ro. 8:28) as Naomi morphed from “Mara” (bitter) to the fulfilled life God wanted for her. Those encounters & teachings move us right into the world’s hope for a coming, redeeming Messiah.

We’re 13 chapters away from *The Birth of a King*, in *The Story*. My solution is to postpone Christmas until the mid March. How will that work for you? Today is the 1st day of Advent. In Gen. 1, God says, “Let us make man (humanity) in our image.” The “us” is the Trinity, in agreement about the high calling & the high expectations that God has for all of us. In Lev. 11 God says, “Be holy because I am holy.” But we’ve seen that we all fall short of that mark, sometimes very far short. We need someone to stand in for us who is without sin. In Deut. 18, God promises to “raise up for [us] a prophet like you [Moses] from among their brothers; I will put my words in His mouth, & He will tell them everything I command Him. If anyone does not listen to my words that the prophet speaks in my name, I Myself will call him to account.”

 So at least from the time of Moses, the Israelites had been looking for this promised

 prophet, the Messiah, Christ. The promise was that the Messiah would come through the line of David. Many Scriptures point to His coming. But 2 point specifically to His birth. Isaiah 7 says,

“Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of men? Will you try the patience of my God also? Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel—God with us.”

It was Ahaz, king of Judah, who was trying God’s patience. In spite of Isaiah assuring God would take care of the attacks from Syria & Ephraim, Ahaz insisted on calling upon the help of Assyria to defend Jerusalem. Isaiah told Ahaz to ask God for a sign, but Ahaz refused, offending God. So, God Himself gave a sign. The 1st sign would have given some assurance of the swift defeat of Ephraim & Syria, but the 2nd is one which only time can bring around—the virgin birth. The sign we didn’t read talks about the devastation that will happen to Ephraim, Syria & Judah by a northern kingdom (Assyria). Between the time when Isaiah speaks & the virgin gives birth, Judah will be taken into captivity in Babylon. That’s a long story we’ll get to in the New Year.

 But why is the child called Immanuel? It’s an announcement by God to the house of David of the birth of a Child highly named & expected as the coming of a glorious Prince within this royal family. While it seems mysterious & abrupt to us, it fell from Isaiah’s lips on hearts that **cherished as their dearest hope** the appearance of a glorious descendant of David. At the time of the prophecy the Israelites were particularly sensitive to this hope, because both David’s city—Jerusalem & David’s dynasty were in peril. Ahaz would have understood this; by his unbelief & refusal to ask God, he excluded himself & mortgaged the hope of Israel. He disinherited the promised King. But **The Child, who is Israel’s hope**, is born & receives the Divine name; Ahaz has spoiled everything about the event but the Name. Ahaz, is like the Judas of the OT. He has betrayed the Messiah & Deliverer of his people.

 In Micah’s prophecy, Messiah’s birthplace is disclosed; the town of David—Bethlehem.

“Out of you will come…one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times…He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.”

Again, hope oozes.

 Malachi is the last book written in the OT, 400 years BC. During those 400 years there were no prophets; God was silent; the people waited expectantly, **hopefully**. Malachi says,

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come…See I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great & dreadful day of the Lord comes.”

Jesus later reveals that the prophet Elijah who comes to prepare the way for the Lord is John the Baptist. The messenger of the covenant is none other than Jesus Himself. So you see, there was great anticipation of the coming Messiah.

 Matthew opens his Gospel with: “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham.” Does it not amaze you that Matthew chooses to start his gospel with a list of names—& who thought we would ever read them! For us, yes, but for Jews it’s the most natural thing; purity of lineage is uber important. If any foreign blood was discovered, the man lost his right to be called a Jew & be a member of the people of God. This pedigree of Jesus is carefully arranged into 3 groups of 14 people each. The 3 sections represent the 3 great stages of Jewish history. The 1st takes the history down to David, Israel’s greatest king, who for-ged Israel into a powerhouse nation. Remember God was building a nation? The 2nd takes Isra-el to the exile to Babylon, a time of shame & tragedy for the Jews. The 3rd takes the history to Jesus. He alone liberated people from their slavery & shame & turned tragedy into triumph.

 William Barkley argues that these 3 time periods also represent 3 stages in the spiritual history of humanity. God created us in His own image. We have been born for greatness. That has always been God’s desire for us; we’ve been designed to have fellowship with God. But 2nd, we’ve lost our greatness. Instead of becoming the servant of God, we’ve become the slave of sin. We’re not what we were meant to be. Our free will has been used to ignore & disobey God, rather than to honour Him & enjoy His fellowship & friendship. Thankfully, our greatness is retrievable, not because of us but because of God, who didn’t abandon us when we strayed. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ into our brokenness & into our broken world to rescue us from our mess of sin & free us from its chains, & restore us to right fellowship with God.

 Over and over again we hear that Christ is the son of David. This is how Jesus was spoken of by the crowds. The Jews never forgot that they were the chosen people of God. In spite of their many disasters they never forgot their destiny. This descendant of David would lead them to the glory they believed was their birthright. He would bring fulfilment to their desires for peace & loveliness & greatness. He offers real life where no other can or does.

 As we’ve read so clearly this morning, Jesus is the fulfilment of prophecy. There is both purpose & design in this universe. Through the prophets come the great hope & the eternal truth that life & the world are not spinning their wheels, but moving toward the goal of God!

 But there’s more. 4 women appear in this pedigree. It’s not normal to find women named in Jewish pedigree at all. Women had no legal rights & were regarded more as possessions than persons. Even more amazing is who these women were. Rahab was a prostitute of Jericho. Ruth, wasn’t even Jewish, but a Moabite. Moabites were not to enter the assembly of the Lord forever. Tamar was a seducer & an adulteress. Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, was the woman King David seduced from her husband Uriah, then had him killed. You could not find 4 less likely ancestors of Jesus Christ! Or maybe that’s the point. This is the core of the Gospel. Jesus came to blow out barriers.

 Jesus exploded the barrier between Gentile & Jew. Rahab, the woman of Jericho & Ruth the Moabite find their place in the pedigree. God’ love reaches to everyone. Jesus blew out the barriers between men & women. Both stand equally loved by God & equally important. Jesus blew out the barrier between the righteous & the sinner. This is the depth of Jesus’ identification with all of us. There’s hope for all of us—the hope the prophets announce to us in advance!

 And both angels & dreams herald His coming. For the only time in all eternity, a child was born to a virgin. You can imagine if you were to hear this today, how it would be greeted with cynicism, ridicule & scorn. So was it in those days. Joseph, who was engaged to Mary, no doubt was himself incredulous. Rather than have Mary publicly disgraced, he resolved to divorce her quietly. The 2 were promised to each other & considered like a married couple for the year prior to their wedding, except that they had no sexual relations throughout this year. God works through Joseph by appearing to him in a dream, addresses Joseph as “son of David”, and assures Joseph that “what is conceived in [Mary] is from the Holy Spirit.” And the child is to be called “Jesus, because He will save His people from their sins (Jesus means ‘the Lord saves’)”.

 It’s always important to Matthew to show how Jesus is the fulfilment of the Scriptures. He points out that all this took place to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy that the virgin would be with child and they will call Him Immanuel.

 Do you see how God is with us? Do you see how He has established an appointment with all humanity from the beginning? Do you see how He has identified with every one of us through the genealogy Matthew gives us? Do you understand that He came for you personally? Do you realize He desires to restore you to right fellowship and friendship with God, in a way you could never accomplish on your own? Will you accept His invitation to leave your old self behind and give your new self to Him to mold and make you into His image? Jesus says, “Come!” **Our eternal hope comes through the prophets to Christ**. Share that with someone this week.