House of Bread – Advent 1

Micah 5:2-5a December 1 2024

John 6:32-35; John 6:47-58 Kimby Young

Luke 1:67-79 – Zechariah

In Hebrew beth means house and lehem means bread. So the name Bethlehem means house of bread. It is meant to be a place of nourishment, life and peace. Though as we know the world crashes in and peace is hard to find in Bethlehem these days. Bethlehem was the birth home of David who became the great king of Israel. Later Bethlehem was prophesied to be where the Messiah of Israel would be born. Before that we hear of Bethlehem as the home to which Ruth and Naomi returned after famine. Where Ruth married Boaz and gave birth to David’s ancestor. David of course was the ancestor of the coming Messiah as our reading from Micah testifies. Jesus’ human heritage was through that house and line of David.

Jesus born in this house of bread Bethlehem becomes known later in life as the living bread – the bread of life – who brings life and strength and light to the whole world. I had not thought about all these connections until I read an article earlier this year by Amy Jill Levine in Illustrated Ministry. Now the symbolism of bread and life and Jesus is all I can see. When Jesus was born, in this house of bread Bethlehem, he was placed in a manger by his loving parents – a warm protected place. A manger was usually used for food to feed animals. The living bread Jesus started life in a feeding trough. So in a very real sense from the day of his birth, Jesus, the bread of life, was symbolically ready to feed the world. In the gospel of John, Jesus reminds us that Jesus satisfies all hunger and thirst. Jesus fills every need. If we receive Jesus, we are nourished. We are filled. As we receive the bread of life, we have everything that we ever need.

Today as we share communion, the reminders continue. When we break bread, we remember the body of Christ broken on the cross, broken for us, broken to break the power of sin and death. When we pour out and drink, wine or juice, we remember Jesus’ blood poured out for the world. Jesus died so we don’t have to. Jesus rose again to open the way to eternal life for everyone. We remember the symbolism of communion every single month. We remember Christ’s presence with us always, and Jesus’ invitation here at this table to receive all of the gifts God has to offer. This time of year, we add a layer of meaning to our sacrament. We remember that the bread of life was born for this reason. Jesus was born to feed us. Jesus was born to give us life eternal. From the bread of life in a manger to the bread of life on our table, all of Jesus life on earth was intended to feed and save us, to fill and nourish and nurture life. Even now, the bread of life fills us again. Jesus offers us everything we need for fullness of life.

This is a busy time of year. It is a wondrous time of year. There are symbols and reminders all around us of God’s great love in Jesus Christ our Savior. This season is filled to overflowing. Alongside this beauty and bounty and blessing, this can also be an overwhelming time of year -as we try to get everything done, as we miss loved ones, as we worry about not having enough or not doing enough or not being enough. As we worry about loved ones and people in need. Yes, there are gifts and graces to bless our days and lift our spirits. But sometimes we miss those blessings as we rush forward through this season of expectations.

Here on this first Sunday of Advent, this first day of December, this last day of our holiday weekend. Here in this hour of calm before the rush of crazy days. Here and now, here and always, receive the gift of Jesus from the house of bread. Breathe in the breath of life and be filled with God’s peace. Look at this table and receive the gift of living bread. Receive the cup of hope. Receive the gift of Jesus. Be filled. Be satisfied. Be nourished. Be strengthened. That you might go into the world and share the peace you have been given.

The prayer of Zechariah for today from our reading from Luke is a perfect blessing for Thanksgiving weekend and the beginning of Advent. It reminds us of God’s long and lasting plan for hope and salvation. And of our place in that plan. God started way back thousands of years ago offering life. God has saved us and sustained us. God has taught us how to love one another. How to reach out in love in the world. Like Zechariah’s baby son John, we have been fed from our birth, prepared from that first moment of breath and prepared all of our lives. God has shown us the way of peace, the way of love, the way of hope, the way of Jesus. And God has called us to tell people about Jesus and God’s love. As Zechariah says, “to give his people knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins.”

You have been given everything you need to fulfill this mission. To prepare the way of the Lord. You have everything you need. And if you need a taste more… well, beloved children of God, the table is spread, the feast is ready, the bread of life and the cup of hope are here for you and for all to receive. Friends, let us celebrate this joyful and bountiful feast of the people of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.

December 1 2024 – Advent 1

Micah 5:2-5a

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah,

from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel,

whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time

when she who is in labor has brought forth;

then the rest of his kindred shall return to the people of Israel.

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 live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth,

and he shall be the one of peace.

Luke 1:67-79

Then John’s father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

He has raised up a mighty savior for us

in the house of his child David,

as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors

and has remembered his holy covenant,

the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,

to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,

might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness

in his presence all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High,

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

to give his people knowledge of salvation

by the forgiveness of their sins.

Because of the tender mercy of our God,

the dawn from on high will break upon us,

to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

John 6:32-35

Then Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” They said to him, “Sir, give us this bread always.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

John 6:47-58

Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

They then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day, for my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which the ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

The Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God.