

What do we hope for?

27 November 2022 – Advent 1

INTRODUCING TODAY'S READINGS ...

Some possible meanings of the acronym HOPE ...

Hold on, pain ends

Health opportunities for people everywhere

Helping our planet earth

Helping other people everyday

Halt overpopulation with prevention and education

What do we hope for?

What does hope look like? Desire for a certain this to happen? Expectation that it will happen?

Does hope require action on our part or do we sit back and watch it happen?

One symbol of hope is a **rainbow** ...

God's promise to never flood the whole world in a great flood ... sign of hope after rain ...

light splits into various colours ...

can represent a nation (South Africa) or gender (LGTBIQ) ...

can cause controversy at a World Cup soccer tournament ...

For us a rainbow will be the **various shades or colours of hope** that we can explore through Advent, starting today with hope in the OT ...



BIBLE READINGS

Isaiah 11:1-5

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;

from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him –

the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,

the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord –
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash round his waist.

[Micah 5:2-5a](#)

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.
Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labour bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.
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 our peace.

MESSAGE

When our world seems dark and bleak, God often provides a different perspective. The message of **Advent** is that even in the midst of darkness there is the hope of light, of peace, of joy and laughter. Yes the world often seems dark – and yes we

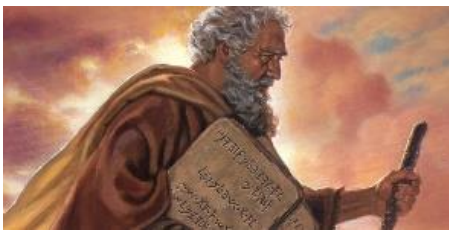


often see no obvious solutions to the mess we find ourselves in – but the message of the OT prophets, the message of John the Baptist, the message of the cast of characters who make up the Advent stories is that God has a plan to reshape the world to bring light and hope.

Today we are going to explore some of the contours of this hope from the **Hebrew Bible**, our OT.

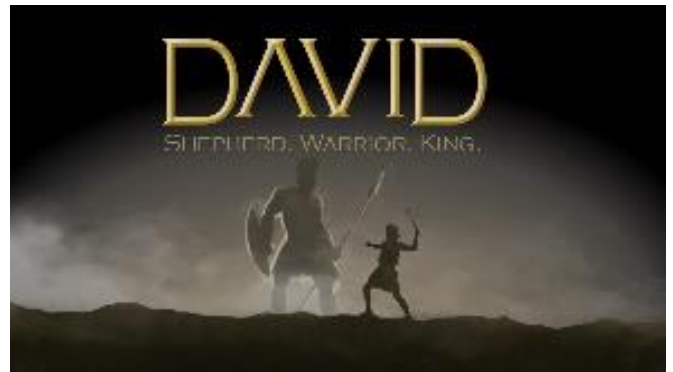
When times are tough and the outlook is bleak – as it often was for Israel – a fairly natural thing is to look back through one's history to earlier outstanding leaders and to pray that God would raise up similar leaders in the present.

For Israel the two most revered leaders in history were **Moses** and **David**.



Moses was of course the **lawgiver** but also the key figure in the **Exodus** from Egypt ...

... while David was the **king** who united the tribes of Israel and defeated enemies on every side, bringing in a rare era of peace and prosperity for the nation. He also captured the city of Jerusalem and made it his capital and eventual site of the temple.



As we shall see shortly, what the people often longed for was another King David, and this hope slowly morphed into hope for a **Messiah**, which is the Hebrew word for **Anointed One** or **King**.



This hoped for king was sometimes called **Son of David**, meaning that he would **embody** the best attributes of David – being a mighty warrior, showing great courage, having a zeal to worship God – while the more sordid parts of David's life – his adultery, treachery and dysfunctional family – were quietly ignored. The messianic hope took many shades as we'll see shortly, but usually included hope for military victory over enemy armies and a restoration of true worship of God.

As Australia struggles through difficult times – recovering from the effects of covid, fires and floods, dealing with high prices for everything from houses and rent to

food and fuel – I wonder which historical leaders **we** might look back to with fondness, hoping that our current leaders might embody something of these previous heroes ...

Some might look back to **John Curtin**, the wartime Prime Minister who united the country in purpose and encouraged us to stand firm in difficult and dark days. Or perhaps **Robert Menzies**, the postwar Prime Minister who guided Australia through a long period of prosperity and cheap housing. Or even **Bob Hawke**, the charismatic PM who brought businesses and unions together and who opened up Australia's economy to the world. In each case what people hope for is a leader who



will bring both peace and prosperity to the nation and sometimes who will bring justice and equality.



In thinking about these past heroes, one also wonders which **women leaders** we might look back to ... people like Emmeline Pankhurst, Edith Cowan or Ruth Bader Ginsberg. If you've not heard of these women and what they achieved, go and do some research as your homework ...

Moving onto our Scripture readings for today, I've chosen two passages from the OT prophets – one well known and one more obscure – that pick up two different strands of OT hope for a Messiah, a new King David.

The first reading is from Isaiah, a book that features heavily in our Advent and Christmas readings. This book tells how Israel faced and barely survived the threat of **Assyria** – a powerful northern neighbour – but how the country eventually fell to the **Babylonians** ... a bit like Ukraine surviving the onslaught of Russia only to then be attacked by, say, Turkey. The difference to today is that Israel did not have powerful friends they could call on to help them.

In our reading today, Israel has been largely destroyed by Assyria and has been reduced to a **stump** left to rot in the ground. But Isaiah's word of hope is that a shoot will come up from this stump, just as some eucalypts will sprout from the base when chopped down. The stump represents Jesse, the father of David, while the **branch**



that will arise and bear fruit is the hope for a **messiah**. The text goes on to describe the **character** and **actions** of this Messiah.

God's Spirit will rest on this figure – giving him wisdom, knowledge, power and insight. He will not judge by outward appearances but will rule with righteousness, bringing justice to the poor and needy, reflecting God's own character. He will rule with might – striking the earth with the rod of his mouth and slaying the wicked.

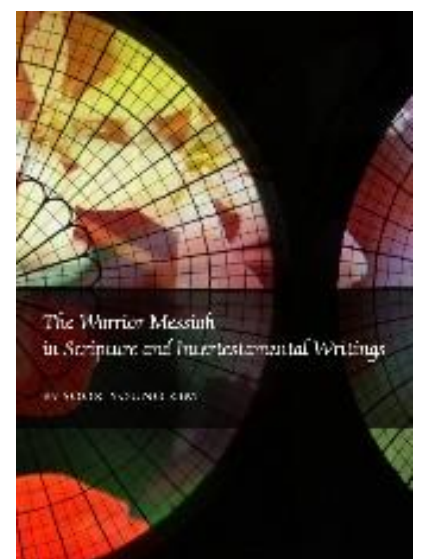
As I said earlier, such a figure is envisaged to embody the best of King David.



Unsurprisingly, many later Jewish groups adopted this hope from Isaiah and shaped it to suit the aims and aspirations of their particular group or movement. So the **Qumran community** who lived near the Dead Sea, for instance, of which John the Baptist may well have been a member, viewed this figure from Isaiah as a warrior figure who would trample the nations – **and** the sinful in Israel – and who would then rule with godly wisdom.

Another group related to the Pharisees – often portrayed as opponents of Jesus – wrote a series of psalms – called the **Psalms of Solomon** – that include many references to this figure from Isaiah who it was hoped would drive out all Gentiles and sinners from Jerusalem, shattering them with an iron rod, and who would then restore true worship in the temple.

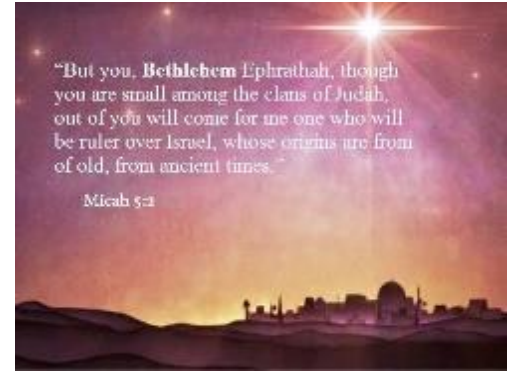
I wonder if you can see any links to the hopes of Jesus' contemporaries ... for a Messiah who would drive out the Romans and restore the corrupt worship in the temple? This is probably the sort of Messiah that John the Baptist was expecting who would **sift** Israel, gathering the good grain and burning the chaff. Perhaps it's why Jesus was so careful about taking on the title of Messiah because these were the common expectations and hopes for the Messiah.



The second reading from **Micah** is also about the hope of a Messiah, but it's somewhat different. The one who will rule Israel – the Messiah – will come from **Bethlehem**, a small clan in Judah.

Why Bethlehem? Because that is the birthplace of King David. It's shorthand for saying that the Messiah will be from the line or lineage of David.

The role of the Messiah here is not the warlike figure from the Isaiah reading. Instead this figure will **shepherd the flock** – another reference to David who was a shepherd before he became king – and will **bring peace**.



I wonder if you can hear the echoes of this Micah reading in Luke's Christmas story? **Why does Luke's action all happen in Bethlehem?** Because that's where the Messiah is to be born if they are from the line of David.

Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem because he was descended from the house and family of David. (Luke 2:4)

Why are shepherds involved? Because the Messiah would shepherd the flock ... the shepherds are a pointer to this role of the Messiah.

In that region there were shepherds living in the fields ... An angel appeared to them and said ... I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people. To you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour who is the Messiah. (Luke 2:8-11)

What will the Messiah do? He will bring peace.

Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying: Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those whom he favours. (Luke 2:13-14)

For the Jewish people living through difficult times, one of the hopes that encouraged and inspired them was the hope of a new King David, a Messiah.

- What will the Messiah be like?
- What will the Messiah do?
- Where will the Messiah come from?

The answers to these questions depended on which OT passage people were reading. Many groups hoped for a Messiah like the one described in Isaiah 11. As it turned out, Jesus was **not** like this warrior warlike Messiah. But later Christian writers like Luke certainly saw connections between Jesus and the figure described in Micah – a different and gentler type of Messiah.

I wonder for us, what **our hopes** are as we come towards the end of another difficult year ... Do we long for a powerful figure who can resolve all the pressing issues with their wisdom, military prowess and strong words? Possibly a figure like the Ukraine President **Volodymyr Zelensky**? Many people around the world are hoping fervently that he can withstand and defeat the might of Russia.



shepherd and who will bring us peace? Humanly speaking I'm not sure who that might be, (maybe another Martin Luther-King?) or how they will win over the world. But during this season of Advent, we are invited to ponder afresh how Jesus came as a vulnerable baby to fulfil the hopes of the Jewish people, but perhaps not in the way they all

expected.