

Micah 5:2-5a
Good Shepherd
December, 2021

One of my favorite Christmas hymns is “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Today Bethlehem is not so little as it has a population of about 40,000 people, slightly smaller than Fond du Lac. At the time of Micah, it was just an unimportant, small town. Our text describes Bethlehem as being small. But in Matthew 2, the Jewish religious leaders reported to Herod that Bethlehem was not least among the rulers of Judah. So what gives here? It sounds like two opposite views about Bethlehem: on one hand “little” and on the other hand, “not so little.”

Actually both views are true! Bethlehem was a “little” town, but a very important town because of someone who would be born there. Bethlehem ranks as a very important city in the plan of God, in spite of its small size. Let's hear more about,

The Ruler from Bethlehem.

Why would God want something important to happen in Bethlehem, a humble town in Judah? Well, it goes back to King David, who was the first ruler to be born in Bethlehem. Bethlehem was an insignificant town and David an insignificant young man, the youngest son of Jesse. But God chose young David to be Israel's next king.

The Lord often chooses unimpressive places and unimpressive people to carry out His work. God can use insignificant pastors to get the gospel message out to people. God uses unimpressive means – ordinary water in Baptism, and unleavened bread and grape wine in the Lord's Supper to bring sinners into His family of believers and strengthen their faith with the promise of forgiveness when these

unimpressive means are used with God's powerful Word.

Listen to our text: But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, (to distinguish it from the Bethlehem near Nazareth) though you are small among the clans of Judah, from you, will go out the one who will be the ruler for Me in Israel. The coming of the Messiah had been prophesied for a long time. Hundreds of years earlier, the Lord had made a promise to King David, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom forever. The promise was made that the Messiah would come, but this Messiah has existed forever. This is Jesus, the Son of God, the eternal Son of God, coming in time, in the flesh, descended from David, born of Mary, true God and true man, our Lord and Savior!

Micah prophesied at a time when things were going from bad to worse for God's people. From the time of Micah to the time when Jesus was born was about 700 years. A lot of bad things happened during those years. The northern kingdom, called Israel, was conquered by the Assyrians. Then the southern kingdom, called Judah, was conquered by the Babylonians. The people fled to many countries, were taken captive, or were ruled by foreign powers. For a very long time, there was no king descended from David on the throne.

What happened to God's promise? Would Micah's prophecy of a King born in Bethlehem take place? Micah wrote, The Lord will give them up, until the time when the woman who is in labor bears a child... For a long time it looked as though God had given up on His people. But, at just the right time, a virgin named Mary gave birth to a Son in Bethlehem, and the child born that night was the Messiah promised by God. God never forgets a promise; He keeps His Word!

And Micah even said what this ruler from Bethlehem would

do! He will stand and shepherd with the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God. They will dwell securely, for at that time He will be great to the ends of the earth.

King David reigned and did some great things while he ruled the small kingdom of Israel. Unfortunately, his reign was ruined by disobedience and sin. But that would not happen in the reign of King Jesus. The Kingdom of Jesus is an eternal, spiritual kingdom. Jesus' Kingdom is not just little Israel, it is the Christian Church in all the world!

- *Micah foretold that the Messiah would shepherd His flock.*
- *Jesus said, I am the good Shepherd.*
- *Jesus gave up His life, dying on the cross, so that we could be rescued from death and damnation.*
- *Jesus then took up His life, showing what is in store for those who trust in Him.*
- *Now we can walk through the valley of the shadow of death without fear because we know that Jesus will lead us through that valley, safe and sound.*

Micah said, They will dwell securely, Micah is writing about us, you and me! We are the Lord's flock, His church. Our salvation is secure in Christ, the Shepherd-King from Bethlehem. And we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Micah ends our text with the words, And He will be their peace. Peace. Everyone wants peace especially in these last days. In Jesus, we have peace. It is a peace that no one can take away from us. In this life we have worries and troubles; but in this life of no peace, we have peace with God.

Jesus suffered our punishment. There is now peace between the perfect God and sinful human beings. Jesus restored our relationship with God that we had broken by sin. Now we are at peace with God. We are now the children of our heavenly

Father. This is the same peace the angels spoke of before the shepherds on the hills near Bethlehem, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward mankind.

- *God is not angry with us because of our sin!*
- *He is at peace with us because Jesus paid our debt of sin!*
- *We now live confidently.*
- *Our salvation is secure!*
- *We know what our future will be – a joyful future with God!*

In humble Bethlehem our eternal Ruler was born.

Friends, find peace in lowly Bethlehem, not earthly peace, but peace with God. Peace because the Son of God was born to be our Savior!

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