

THE CELEBRATION OF THE LIGHT OF CHRIST*"BETHLEHEM: SMALL, BUT STILL CHOSEN!"*

Micah 5:2-5a

Dear Friends in our Coming Lord,

What is your hometown: For many of you, it's Wausau, City of Schofield, (Town of Schofield), Naugart, Maine, Athens, Edgar, Rib Lake, Marathon (Town of Cassel)? Brighton or Bay City, MI? New Ulm or Nevis, MN? Mine was Milwaukee, but my kids' hometowns were Oskaloosa, IA and Greenfield, MN. Many of your answers rumbling about in your head are little tiny towns across America, relatively unknown except to the people that live there. But what makes them popular was that you were born there and spent a part of your lives there.

Unknown places become totally known for a variety of reasons. Let me try some on you:

Green Bay (Packers)

Door County (tourist site of 300 miles of lake MI shoreline with 5 state parks)

Traverse City, MI (award-winning wineries/breweries & a huge cherry festival in July)

Shanksville, PA (United flight #93 crashed on 9/11)

Pearl Harbor, HI (surprise Japanese attack 73 years ago (this Sunday) (today) where over 2,400+ Americans lost their lives and plunged the US into WW II.

We have another such city that is relatively obscure and unheard of until the Spirit led Micah the prophet to include it in a special prophecy about Jesus, the Messiah. As we commemorate Advent with our series *"The Celebration of the Light of Christ"*, we have our focus on that 2nd candle we lit earlier called the Bethlehem Candle. And from these words written around 700 B.C., we see the plan of God in motion as he leads and guides history to find the city of:

"BETHLEHEM: SMALL, BUT STILL CHOSEN!"

1. *To be the birthplace of a King*
2. *To bring the peace of a Shepherd*

1

As popular as Bethlehem is now, it really isn't the kind of place you'd expect to be the birthplace of a King. The name needs a backup name **Ephrathah** just to differentiate it from a Bethlehem located in a region near Nazareth. It has some important Biblical history. **Benjamin**, the son of Jacob, was born near there. His mother Rachel was buried there. **Ruth** harvested the fields of Boaz there. And Bethlehem is the birth town of **King David**. Yet it was a small town, too small to be named among the 100 of cities belonging to the clan of Judah in Joshua, chapter 15.

At the time of this writing, God uses Micah to warn Israel of impending attack of the Assyrians in 701 BC. They would pound them into captivity taking them and their kings into exile to Babylon: Hezekiah, Manasseh, Zedekiah and others hauled away like prisoners into a humiliating exile 1,000 of miles away from home. Even when God's people returned to Jerusalem, things didn't get much better. The great nation of Israel was shambles. The scepter of power had departed from Judah. Like a forest fire that scorches acres of land destroying everything in its path except a few stumps, the light of Judah had gone out and all that was left after this exile was the stump of Jesse, the family of King David.

In anybody's eyes, Bethlehem would be the last choice for a city that would have such an infamous reputation. But not in God's eyes. His eyes saw Bethlehem as a **SMALL, CHOSEN** city **where a King was to be born**.

BUT YOU BETHLEHEM, EPHRATHA, 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. From Bethlehem would come one who would carry out the Father's will; one who would rule over Israel as her spiritual king, not just as an earthly king; one who would establish a new kingdom of David's descendant – **A MESSIAH**. Only this King would have no beginnings, no terms of office, because His origins are from of old in timeless eternity. In other words, this **KING IS JESUS CHRIST, THE ETERNAL SON OF GOD!**

Micah was God's mouthpiece to relay God's marvelous plan of this saving King to these downcast people. Look how he brought another Bethlehem citizen to be ruler. David became the great & mighty King of Israel. But what was he before that? A miserable, weak, puny little shepherd boy. He was a scrawny, undersized, shrimp compared to the mighty 9' giant named Goliath on that battlefield. It should've been a blow out for the Philistines against Israel's armies. But that puny little David had God almighty fighting for him, and with God's help, that little shepherd boy nailed Goliath right between the eyes with his slingshot and dropped him like a rock right where he stood. God came out on top---again!

Micah's message was Law and Gospel. He warns about God's judgment for their sins of idolatry and rebellion. Then he comforts them with a message of hope. **THEREFORE ISRAEL WILL BE ABANDONED UNTIL THE TIME WHEN SHE WHO IS IN LABOR GIVES BIRTH AND THE REST OF HIS BROTHERS RETURN TO JOIN THE ISRAELITES.** Israel would be under the rule of a foreign nation until the time for the Savior to be born. So Micah's counterpart Isaiah foretold this event when he wrote: **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.** (Is 7:14)

What Micah and Isaiah foretold came true. A government census by Caesar Augustus brings Mary & Joseph to Bethlehem where she gives birth to Mary's firstborn Son, Immanuel. Those who believe in the Messiah's promise in the O.T. and those who believed the fulfillment in the N.T. return to join God's family of believers. They, like we, are God's children and co-heirs with Christ--all because of a KING born in a **small, chosen city of Bethlehem.**

2

Bethlehem was not chosen just to be a birthplace of a King, but also to **BRING US THE PEACE OF A SHEPHERD.**

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. This Shepherd King does a different kind of ruling – he is like a shepherd tending his flock. As God and Man, he stands in the strength of the Lord and the majesty of His name and serve us sinners in a way no one else could.

We are sheep/lambs who go astray. How often we have walked the other way, turned our back on Jesus, rebelled against His will, followed our own desires, fell away from His love, and despised His grace. Instead of shepherding us, he should condemn us to everlasting punishment in hell. Instead of bringing us through green pastures, he should snuff us out of his flock to be lost forever.

But this shepherd is unlike any other. Instead of sacrificing the sheep, he sacrifices himself for the sins of the world, yours & mine! He focuses on one mission of saving us from sin, death, and the Devil. His strength defeats those enemies. His strength buys us back. His strength endures our sins and guilt and pays the price fully. In the Gospel, the greatness of Jesus our Shepherd-King reaches to the ends of the earth where souls come to faith in this Savior and find peace for their souls. **I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.** (Jn 10:11)

HE WILL BE THEIR PEACE...3 words in the Hebrew, but what a glorious message they proclaim. Jesus' atoning death made peace between God and us. **The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.** (Is 53:5) His love brings us peace of conscience with the Father. **Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?** (Rom 8:33) The Shepherd's peace provides comfort in the hour of our deaths. **Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.** (Ps 23:4) No wonder the angels outside Bethlehem sang: **Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.** (Lk 2:14)

Pretty soon, we'll be singing that too. But before then, prepare your hearts, your souls, and your lives to make that journey to the little town of Bethlehem. It's a great town, a beautiful town! And in a special way, Bethlehem is the home town for all of us because it **was chosen to be the birthplace of our King** and chosen **to bring us the peace of our Good Shepherd. To Him be the glory...in the highest! AMEN**

{Congregational response: The Apostles' Creed}