

Sermon 12-24-17 (9:00 AM service) Little City – Large Mission Micah 5:2-4

Dear Worshipers at the Manger:

The little town was...

- A collection of miners' shacks
- A general store
- A half-dozen saloons

It was where the rough and tumble men of the 1849 California gold rush spent their free time. It was called roaring camp.

A man by the name of Bret Harte wrote about the only woman who lived in this town who was known as Cherokee Sal. She became pregnant and bore a child. Harte wrote: "Deaths were by no means uncommon in Roaring Camp, but a birth was a new thing."

The mother, Cherokee Sal, did not survive the hardships of the camp's primitive conditions. The child, however, became the darling of every miner there. The child thrived. All of a sudden there was a tremendous desire for cleanliness around the camp for the sake of the infant.

Personal cleanliness was required throughout the camp for anyone who wanted to get near the baby. To be near the infant the miners had to get together with soap and water first.

Harte writes: And so the work of regeneration began in roaring camp...a change came over the settlement.

Measures were taken to make sure the infant was clean and safe. The camp became quieter and more dignified, less noisy and boisterous, no longer could it be called Roaring camp.

The presence of a little baby changed it forever.

Today we remember another little baby and another little town that changed the world.

The baby Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Bethlehem...

- Was never a large town
- It was the birthplace of King David
- It was a little city with a large mission

Bethlehem was a little town in Judah.

- South of Jerusalem
- The name Bethlehem means “House of Bread
- Ephratah means “Fruitful”

About 750 years before Jesus was born Micah foretold that Bethlehem’s child would be a ruler and his origin would be from ancient times.

God takes the obscure and makes them great.

The Apostle Paul wrote: “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are. You are in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. I Corinthians 1:27-30

Bethlehem was not as important as Jerusalem or Bethel, Shiloh or Hebron yet it became mightier than any of them in the plans of God.

In Bethlehem...

- Boaz fell in love with Ruth
- Samuel anointed David
- Benjamin, Jacob’s youngest son was born here
- Rachel, Jacob’s wife was buried here

But Bethlehem was small – less than 1000 people lived here at the time of Jesus' birth.

In this little town, like Roaring Camp, the neighbors took to the baby Jesus when He was born that cold, starry night.

- The shepherds came to see the baby Jesus
- Sometime later the wise men came from the east to see Jesus
- Herod's soldiers came looking to put the baby Jesus to death

But Jesus would survive. He would live to change the world. Out of this little town would come a ruler **"Whose origins are from of old from ancient times."** V2

It was here in Bethlehem that...

- The regeneration of the world would start
- The birth of this baby was the long awaited prince the Jewish nation was waiting for

God chooses the small and insignificant to work His miracles.

- This little town was chosen by God to be the birthplace of our Savior
- Micah the prophet calls this town Bethlehem Ephratah to distinguish it from Bethlehem in Zebulun.

From the beginning of the Bible the birth of Jesus was foretold.

- In Genesis 49 Jacob says **"The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet."**
- Micah is the first prophet to name the birthplace of Jesus as Bethlehem.

Micah says that this One who is born in Bethlehem will be ruler over Israel and that he was eternal – his origins are from of old.

- Jesus existed in eternity
- He had no beginning and has no end.

Micah speaks of God's judgment upon Israel for their idolatry but He says a time of deliverance will come with the birth of the Messiah.

He says in v3 "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."

Jesus' birth meant deliverance for the Jewish people and for the Gentiles – you and me – as referred to the phrase "rest of his brothers."

Jesus calls us family. **"So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. Hebrews 2:11**

"For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way...because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." Hebrews 2:17

It is a source of comfort knowing that we have a Savior who was just like us except he had no sin. He took our flesh and lived in our world.

He understands what we go through.

Think for a moment how God works.

- David was a little shepherd boy, but God made him king.
- Abraham was just another resident of Ur but God made a great nation out of him
- Mary was an obscure peasant girl, yet she gave birth to Jesus
- Joseph was an unknown carpenter, but God enabled him to guard Jesus from his enemies.

God transforms the small and insignificant into an implement of His power.

Micah says in v4: "Jesus 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."

Jesus stands as Shepherd-King...standing and feeding His sheep

- Jesus stood in hell after his death on the cross
- In Jesus we see the majestic power of God
- In Jesus we see the tender love of the Shepherd
- In Jesus we have security far more reliable than...
 - Health insurance
 - A pension
 - Social security

Here in Jesus we see the King clad in the royal robes of Jehovah's power. He is our Shepherd watching over us with the eyes of love.

God took the little town of Bethlehem and gave it a great mission.

- Jesus born in Bethlehem became the greatest Gift for the benefit of the whole world
- Regeneration has spread from Bethlehem to the far corners of the world.

Bethlehem represents what God can do with the small and unimportant

- Where would the Reformation have gone without a little known monk named Luther?
- What about the little orphan Bach whom God enabled to produce beautiful music?
- An acorn minuscule until it grows into a gigantic oak

You and I may be small and unimportant in the world of...

- Wall Street
- Pennsylvania Ave

Yet, under God we may be a little Bethlehem...a gift from heaven that will change our part of the world.

Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? Jesus said: **“Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”**

A young boy in Little Rock, Arkansas loved playing baseball. His parents say that his first words were “Play ball, Daddy” His first bat was a sawed- off broomstick. This little boy became one of baseball’s greatest players in the 1960’s.

Brooks Robinson never forgot his humble beginnings in Arkansas to the major leagues.

Jesus Christ who tells us that we can withstand all things through Him gives us the courage we need to face whatever life may bring.

Because of Jesus – that baby in that little town of Bethlehem – you and I need never, never despair for He makes the humble great – if not in this world then certainly in heaven.

We sing the song “O Little town of Bethlehem and How still we see thee lie!”

Prayer: O holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us, we pray, Cast out our sin and enter in, Be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels. The great glad tidings tell. Oh, come to us, Abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel.