

December 3, 2017 From A Very Small Town Micah 5:1-5

The First Sunday in Advent. It is official. We are now in the all too short run up to Christmas 2017. There is an inevitability about this time of year. The Christmas crush, and the Christmas rush are phrases we use to make the point that “there is so little time, and so much to do.” There are cookies to bake, and specific groceries to gather... God help us if we forget to get whatever it takes to serve cranberry jelly, or cranberry sauce! Shopping to do. I usually get that done in good time, but my family knows, I can be caught wrapping presents up to and even past the 12th hour on Christmas Eve...usually with one eye on a black and white, very old movie that focuses on the meaning of Christmas, that God touches hearts, and changes lives.

We begin the Advent journey by turning this morning to the Old Testament and the writings of the Prophet Micah. Micah warns Israel and Judah of the judgement of God that is going to fall upon the capital cities of both Kingdoms, Samaria and Jerusalem. The problem is the waywardness of the ruling class, and the sin of prophets and priests alike. The poor were oppressed and in general people’s lives did not reflect that they are the children belonging to a holy God.

Did you know that there are two Bethlehems in Judah in the time of the prophet Micah? In a clarity of detail typical of the Scriptures, we are talking about Bethlehem Ephrathah, a very small town approximately 6 miles south of

Jerusalem. That tiny, inconsequential community is the place where God marks the spot with a significant X. “Through you,....out of you, will come one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are of old from ancient times.” He is talking about Jesus. He is talking about the birth of the Christ child in the time of Herod the King, and Augustus Caesar. And he is talking about these things centuries before they occurred.

Caesar would order a census. Joseph would make the journey with his wife Mary, who is expecting a child to the city of David, because he belonged to the Davidic family tree. Mary too for that matter. And while they were there, doing this government required business, she would go into labour. Her firstborn would come into the world. And everyone would always be able to explain in human terms how these things came to pass...but...but....the prophet lays out the claim that it will happen and happen in Bethlehem as part of the outpouring of the grace of God upon and for HIS people.

This child who will be born according to the claim of Micah His origins are from ancient times. The KJV says, “from everlasting”. An even better translation is “His origins are from eternity.” It is the point centuries before the Christmas story came to pass, that the Son was with God and was God. In other words the Messiah would be God, clothed in flesh for all to see, for some to touch, for many to be touched by HIM.

I resent the movie title “The Man Who Created Christmas.” A film which presents the life of Charles Dickens.

He did not create Christmas, the eternal God did that. Dickens was a great author. He was also a rogue. Neither a good husband or father. And yet Christmas touched him, inspired him, and his Christmas stories made him a wealthy man. Many have taken advantage of the facts and the faith and the hope which comes with this season of the year... because God is real and Jesus saves. The whole world is touched by this time of the year. Celebration has become an undeniable reality for most. Even those who deny the facts in the Gospels as sound cannot resist the acknowledgement of the power of those facts.

And just what are the facts? The first is the place, an obscure and small town south of Jerusalem, Bethlehem Ephrathah. A young woman goes into labour and has a son. He is cradled in the straw of a manger because there are no rooms to be rented. As a man that son becomes a shepherd to the flocks of those who hunger for God's love and presence. What HE does, what HE teaches, HE does in the name of the one eternal and living God, Almighty. HIS greatness is that HE is known all over the world. Believers are to be found world wide. And to them...to us...HE is peace...salvation from sin...the satisfaction of the hunger of the human soul.

In 23 days, Christmas 2017 will be a memory. But such a memory, that the one whose birthday it represents will change the nature of the rest of the year and the rest of our lives. To God be the glory. The prophecy came to pass. Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Let us pray;

Lord mark our steps with your love and peace.
Inspire us with new ideas and visions. Grants that we may be an
instrument in your hand even as the times unfold. May your
truth be the basis of our doing. May we serve you in the service
of others. In Jesus name we pray. AMEN