Advent 4 Micah 5:2-5
December 19, 2021 361-23-41/228-21

Go to Little Bethlehem!
I. To worship your eternal God.
II. To find your Shepherd-King.
III. To learn a lesson about God's ways.

Dear Christian friends,

How many people **around the world** do you think know about Fox Lake? They might recognize the name **Wisconsin** or be familiar with **Milwaukee**. But Fox Lake? Fox Lake is too small **among the cities** of Wisconsin to be well-known **around the world**.

Today little Bethlehem is WELL-KNOWN all around the world. **Well-known** because of what Micah here prophesies. But BEFORE that **first Christmas** Bethlehem was basically a HICK TOWN overshadowed by **royal Jerusalem** just a few miles down the road. Bethlehem was TOO SMALL to rate much attention.

But **here we are** this morning getting ready to go ONCE AGAIN to **little Bethlehem**. Yes, GO TO LITTLE BETHLEHEM – **go**, 1)to worship your **eternal God**, 2)to find your **Shepherd-King** and 3)to learn a lesson about **God's ways**.

I. To worship your eternal God.

Why are we going to **little** Bethlehem? **Why** are we having all these Christmas services? **What** is the children's service all about? Yes, it's not a PROGRAM or a PLAY. We are not coming to be entertained by the children or impressed by **how well they know** their parts. These **Christmas services** are not for us to GAWK at the Christ-child. We are not making a SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY to **little Bethlehem** – the ***"swaddling clothes"*** – the manger – the POOR BABY Jesus "asleep on the hay."

All those special services are JUST THAT – WORSHIP services. GO to **little Bethlehem** to worship your **eternal God**. Yes, we will kneel before a little Baby – the ***"firstborn Son"*** of the virgin Mary. That Baby born in DAVID'S CITY is a direct descendant of King David. That Baby is JUST HOURS OLD - yet ***"His goings forth are …from the days of eternity."***

GO to **little** Bethlehem to behold a miracle. There is the miracle of the VIRGIN BIRTH. **Mary's Son** was not conceived in the NORMAL WAY as a **child of Joseph** and Mary. Jesus has NO HUMAN father. **Mary** was a virgin. IN OBEDIENCE to the 6th Commandment Mary and Joseph had not been fooling around or living together before they were married. When Mary asked the **angel Gabriel** how she could have a baby UNDER THOSE CIRCUMSTANCES Gabriel had told her, ***"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. For nothing is impossible for God."*** CONCEIVED by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary Jesus was born without original sin and **without a sinful nature**.

Even more miraculous than the VIRGIN BIRTH is the Virgin's SON. That **little Baby** is the eternal Son of God IN THE FLESH. Jesus is God become man – our **Creator born** a creature. Isaiah calls Jesus ***"Immanuel"*** – God with us. John calls Jesus ***"the Word"*** and writes, ***"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God."*** Through this little Child in the manger ***"all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."*** GO to **little** Bethlehem to kneel before the manger – to WORSHIP the Christ-child and confess, ***"My Lord and my God!"***

That Baby looks like **any other** baby. **Like any other** baby He will grow up. But this One is different. Mary didn't have to WONDER WHAT Jesus **would be** when He grew up. GO to **little Bethlehem**…

II. To find your Shepherd-King.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, 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. His goings forth are …from the days of eternity."

Those words ***"for Me"*** are the KEY TO UNDERSTANDING Jesus' life. Jesus was sent by His heavenly Father to CARRY OUT a specific mission. ***"You are to give Him the name Jesus,"*** the angel had instructed Joseph, ***"for He will save His people from their sins."*** Years later Jesus told His disciples, ***"My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."***

Micah uses the PICTURE of a **shepherd** to explain Jesus' mission. Shepherds were a familiar sight around **little** Bethlehem. Here David had tended his father Jesse's flocks. Here that first Christmas ***"were shepherds abiding out in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night."*** But this Shepherd is our GOOD Shepherd. ***"He will stand and shepherd with the strength of the LORD. They will dwell securely."*** A shepherd has three basic jobs – LEADING – FEEDING and PROTECTING the flock. So the Lord Jesus does for us.

Sheep are **basically** dumb, defenseless animals. They are not swift to **run away**. They have no horns or **claws** or sharp teeth to **defend** themselves. Sheep are EASY PICKINGS for their enemies.

Apply that to our **spiritual life**. We were DEFENSELESS against sin, death and the devil. What could we do about our SINS? We can't deny that we've broken and **ignored** God's clear commandments – starting with that **very first** commandment that God is to ALWAYS COMES FIRST in our lives. We can't hide from God. We have no excuses God will accept. We can't fool God into thinking were BASICALLY GOOD, decent people. We can't make it up to God for the **way we've treated** Him. What could we do about the DEVIL? Closing our eyes **won't make him** disappear. What **could we do** about DEATH? The best medical care and **best health insurance** won't stop us from eventually dying. THEN WHAT?

"I am the Good Shepherd," Jesus says, and then He proves those aren't just EMPTY WORDS. ***"I lay down My life for the sheep."*** Our Good Shepherd is also ***"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."*** The SINLESS SON of God was charged with the sins of the whole world and punished in our place. Jesus offered up His holy life as ***"the atoning sacrifice"*** to pay for all our sins. **With His death** Jesus ***"crushed the serpent's head"*** – destroyed the **devil's hold** on us. IN THE FACE of death our Good Shepherd says, ***"My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of My hand."*** Our Shepherd who died for us has ***"taken up His life"*** – Jesus rose triumphant from the dead and He shares His victory with us. ***"Because I live, you shall live also."***

Jesus our Shepherd LEADS and FEEDS us. He does that through His holy Word. Here Jesus leads us ***"into the green pastures and quiet waters"*** of the GOSPEL and ***"restores our souls"*** with the GOOD NEWS of God's love and forgiveness. Here Jesus ***"leads us in the paths of righteousness"*** – WARNING us about ways that might hurt us or lead us away from Him – GUIDING us to God-pleasing decisions and **actions** – LEADING us home to heaven. Here **in the Word** Jesus SPEAKS to us words of divine comfort – **peace** – hope – encouragement – **correction** – **direction**. GO to **little** Bethlehem. You won't find those blessings ANYWHERE but in that little Baby born in **little** Bethlehem.

"This one will be their peace." Soon we'll hear the angel proclaim, ***"Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace."*** In Jesus' BLOOD SHED on the cross we have the peace of sins forgiven. THROUGH FAITH in Jesus we **have the peace** of a new, restored relationship with our Creator. With Jesus' LOVE and PRESENCE and PROMISES we can live in peace **even as we deal** with life's hassles and hardships. **Trusting in Jesus** we have peace in death – we can ***"depart in peace"*** – because

we're going straight to heaven. GO to **little** Bethlehem and find your peace – **not** in THINGS or MONEY or PRESENTS or **twinkling lights** but in that little Baby lying in a manger.

GO to **little** Bethlehem…

III. To learn a lesson about God's ways.

A little town. A **little** Baby. Paul once 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 …to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him."*** Through Isaiah God SIMPLY SAYS, ***"My ways are not your ways.'***

GO to **little** Bethlehem and learn the lesson that God is not impressed with the FANCY and FLASHY. God uses the PLAIN and ORDINARY. **Little** Bethlehem. A **little** Baby. A **bloody** cross. A Book. Some water – some bread and wine. NOTHING IMPRESSIVE – but don't be fooled! That Baby is our ALMIGHTY SAVIOR. That cross is OUR SALVATION. That Book – those simple sacraments – ***"are the power of God unto salvation."***

GO to **little** Bethlehem and learn a lesson about God's TIMING. ***"The LORD will give them up, until the time when the woman who is in labor bears a Child."*** From the TIME OF MICAH to the first Christmas – some **700 years** – Judah was ***"given up."*** Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel. The Babylonians destroyed the temple – razed Jerusalem – hauled the Jews off into captivity. The Babylonians were replaced with the **Medes** and **Persians** – then came the Greeks followed by the Romans. **God's people** lived under FOREIGN OCCUPATION - they went through HARD TIMES and DARK DAYS. But through it all God was working all things ACCORDING TO HIS **schedule** and **plans**. God's promises and people may have **looked like** a LOST CAUSE but ***"when the time had fully come"*** God came through on His promises. God's WAYS and TIMING may not always make sense to us - they may **leave us** confused and befuddled – but GOD KNOWS what He's doing. Learn that **lesson** and TRUST God's **Word**.

Little Bethlehem. A **little** Baby. **So many** LITTLE PEOPLE – Mary – Joseph – the shepherds – Simeon – Anna. **Basically** they are all a BUNCH OF NOBODIES just like us. Let's not kid ourselves – we are LITTLE people. **Nobody** really notices us. How many people REALLY CARE who you are? That's what makes it so neat to GO to **little** Bethlehem. There **at the manger** we see WHAT GOD THINKS about us. God loves us so much that **He gave us** His own Son to be our Shepherd and Savior. So LET'S GO to **little** Bethlehem again this Christmas. Worship your God in that manger. Rejoice in your **Savior's birth**. Learn about **God's ways**. That will make this a MERRY Christmas indeed. Amen.

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