

The One

Micah 5:2

This week I want to return for a closer look at Micah 5:2. (You'll find Micah between Jonah and Nahum.)

This is the exact verse the Jewish leaders of Herod's time quoted when Herod enquired about Old Testament prophecies predicting the Messiah's birth—Micah 5:2: **But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.**

That is, I think, one of the clearest—and it is certainly one of the most important—Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. It describes where He would be born, who He really is, and how He will eventually triumph and rule in Israel. It's an amazingly full text, and you'll see that, I think, as we study it together.

This verse (and the passage that immediately follows it) was clearly recognized as a messianic prophecy. In fact, even before Christ came, this was noted and studied as one of the clearest and most important of all the Old Testament's messianic prophecies—because it foretold the exact town in which Messiah was to be born. It therefore established a significant credential by which any claimant to the office of the Messiah could be examined. If someone pretended to be the Messiah but his birthplace was anywhere else from Dan to Beer-sheba, you would know he was a two-bit phony.

As a matter of fact, in John 7, Jesus' enemies used that very argument against Him. *And this is important.* Bear in mind that Jesus did not go around announcing to people indiscriminately that He was the Messiah. In all His years of public ministry, He revealed that fact to only a handful of people, always in private

settings. For example, when the woman at the well, in John 4:25, said to Jesus, **"I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things,"** Jesus answered her with a plain declaration that He was in fact the Messiah Israel was waiting for. He said, **"I who speak to you am He."** That was really the only time He came right out and told someone in plain, declarative language that He was in fact the Messiah who had been promised.

Something similar occurred during Jesus' encounter with the Man born blind in John 9. Only there, Jesus used a messianic *title*, **"Son of Man."** John 9:35: **"Do you believe in the Son of Man?"** And when the blind man asked, **"Who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?"** Jesus replied (v. 37): **"You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you."**

Later, in Matthew 16:16, when Peter said, **"You are the Christ [the Messiah], the Son of the living God,"** Jesus affirmed that Peter had spoken correctly. Those were all basically private declarations, not public announcements. In fact, even though the other disciples obviously heard Peter's confession and knew Jesus had affirmed it, at the end of that conversation, Jesus turned to them, and Matthew 16:20 says, **"He strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ."** And on another occasion, in Luke 4:34, a demon began to try to announce who Jesus really was. Luke says the demon **"cried out with a loud voice, 'Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are—the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent and come out of him!'"** That led to a number of subsequent exorcisms, and just a few verses later, in Luke 4:41, Luke writes, **"demons also came out of many, crying, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ [—the Messiah]."** Mark 3:11-12 says, **"whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, 'You are the**

Son of God.' And he strictly ordered them not to make him known."

So Jesus didn't go around making public announcements that He was the Messiah. He simply did the works of God and let people come to their own conclusion. And they did. That's what the Triumphal entry was all about. When people greeted Him with Hosannas "**to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!**" and "**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel!**"—they were expressly declaring that He was the rightful Messiah. He accepted the praise, and when some Pharisees ordered Him to rebuke the disciples for praising Him like that, "**He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out.'**" That, of course strongly insinuated that Jesus Himself claimed to be Messiah, but it still wasn't quite the same as declaring it publicly and openly.

In fact, the only time I can think of where Jesus publicly proclaimed His messiahship was at the very end of His earthly ministry, when He was on trial before the high priest. Matthew 26:63 says, "**Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, 'I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.'** Jesus said to him, '**You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.'**" That's when the high priest tore his robes and the Sanhedrin pronounced Him guilty—and the torture of Jesus began.

Nevertheless, there had always been speculation among the people about whether Jesus was the true Messiah or not. John the Baptist had pointed Jesus out and applied Messianic titles to Him. And it's clear that one of the driving fears behind the relentless opposition Jesus got from the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin was their concern that the people would want to make Jesus Messiah, and that would in effect depose them. As a matter of fact, the Sanhedrin more or less admitted that that was at the heart of their

hatred for Jesus. John 11:48, they said, **"If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation."**

So they were *eager* to discredit Jesus and demonstrate that He lacked the credentials of the Messiah. They knew, of course, that he came from Galilee. That's where He grew up. As we saw last week, Matthew 2:23 says of Him, **"He shall be called a Nazarene."** Very early in Jesus' ministry, Philip, who was following John the Baptist's lead, told Nathanael in John 1:46, **"We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote"**—which is to say, *"We have found the Messiah!"* And then Philip went on to name Him: **"Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."** You remember Nathanael's reply? **"Can *anything* good come out of Nazareth?"**

So it was well-known that Jesus was a Nazarene, from Galilee, not Bethlehem. And apparently some of the Pharisees, not knowing anything about Jesus, supposed Nazareth was also Jesus' birthplace. So they challenged Him on that basis.

In John 7, we're given a window into the conflict over this very issue. Turn there for a minute, because this is interesting. John 7, starting in verse 25. When the people saw Jesus teaching openly in the Temple, even though they knew the Pharisees wanted to kill Him, some of the *people* said, **"Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? But we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from."**

Now, they were wrong in thinking no one would know where Messiah would come from. But these were common people, not Old Testament scholars. So Jesus says, **"You know me, and you [do] know where I come from."** And He declares that He is from God: **"I have not come of my own accord. He who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from**

him, and he sent me." Now, they knew that was true, because they had seen Jesus do so many miracles. So (v. 31): "**many of the people believed in him. They said, 'When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?'**"

Predictably, that set the Pharisees into a rage. They had already been trying to arrest Jesus and more or less quietly remove Him as an influence—but they had not even been able to lay a hand on Him (v. 30). And now here He was on their turf, openly teaching, and people were speaking of Him in messianic terms. So (v. 32) "**The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about him, and the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him.**"

But Jesus kept teaching. And He was using messianic imagery Himself. Verse 38: "**Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'**" And that only enflamed the speculation about His being the Messiah. Verse 40: some of the people began to speculate about whether Jesus was the great prophet Moses spoke about, and (v. 41) others boldly stated that He must be the Messiah described in the Old Testament prophets.

But still there was this contingent, probably led by some Pharisees, who said (vv. 41-42): "**Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?'**"

Now, they are clearly referring to our text, [Micah 5:2](#), which does indeed plainly say that when the Messiah came He would be born in Bethlehem. And if they had known Christ better they would have known that he did in fact meet that qualification perfectly. Bethlehem was His *birthplace*, even though He made his *childhood home* in Galilee.

Now, back to Micah. I hope you can easily see that this was an important messianic prophecy, and it was recognized as such by

the scholars and religious leaders of Jesus' time, even before Jesus' birth.

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem is one of some fifty or more key elements of Old Testament prophecy that were perfectly fulfilled by Christ. Moreover, here was the fulfillment of a key messianic credential that could not *possibly* have been engineered by any human scheming. Joseph and Mary would never have gone to Bethlehem at all at the time of Jesus' birth if it were not for a decree from Caesar Augustus that made the journey to Bethlehem an absolute necessity. This was an extreme hardship for Joseph and Mary, to be sure—but like most of the hardships we face as believers, it was orchestrated by God for an infinitely greater good. We need to remember that when we are confronted by the inconveniences of life. This was a *huge* inconvenience for Joseph and Mary, but it was a matter of eternal importance and a key proof that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah.

Now, I want to show you the significance of Micah's prophecy in the context where it is given to us. Micah prophesied close to the same time as Isaiah. He was a younger contemporary of Isaiah's. And he lived through a time of great difficulty and serious political and economic trouble in Israel. His career spanned the reign of Hezekiah and at least two other kings of Judah. Hezekiah was perhaps the *best* king who sat on David's throne after the division of the kingdom. This was the southern Kingdom, Judah.

Bear in mind that the northern kingdom, Israel, never had a single righteous ruler. All their kings were bad. And the southern kingdom, where Micah lived and prophesied, had a badly checkered history. They had a few good kings and lots of bad ones—and even the good kings sometimes did bad things.

At one point during the reign of Hezekiah, Micah collected his prophecies and wrote them out, and thus we have this book in our

canon. The prophet Jeremiah refers to it in Jeremiah 26:18: **"Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and said to all the people of Judah: 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height."**" So that's how Jeremiah summarized Micah's prophecy. It was primarily a foretelling of destruction and judgment against Judah—and the judgment Micah wrote about came a little more than a hundred years after Micah's time, when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, captured the king of Judah, and sent the inhabitants of Judah off in what we know as the Babylonian captivity.

If you are interested in the timeline, it's impossible to pin down the exact start and end dates of Micah's prophecy, but he started his ministry after 750 BC and seems to have passed from the scene before 710. *The MacArthur Study Bible* estimates that this book was written about 735 BC. Now, to put that in perspective, remember that the Babylonian captivity began about 130 years later, in 605 BC. And I believe most of the destruction and judgment Micah foretold pertains to Nebuchadnezzar's time and the beginning of the Babylonian Captivity.

Look, for example, at the passage that leads up to our text. Let's start back in chapter 3. Micah is interspersing threats of judgment with promises of redemption, and the *sequence* is clear even if the *timing* isn't very specific. Chapter 3 is a long lamentation about the wickedness of Israel's rulers—especially how they corrupted justice, hated good, and loved evil (3:3). And chapter 3 lays out the charges against the wicked leaders, closing with this pronouncement (3:12): **"Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height."** Total destruction. Complete and utter ruin. It could not be more bleak.

But then (look with me at this:) chapter 4 describes the peace and fruitfulness of the millennial kingdom, including that famous

statement in verse 3: **"They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore."** This is clearly speaking about a miracle of national redemption that would come at an unspecified time after the judgment described in chapter 3.

But then at the end of chapter 4, Micah brings his prophecy back to the more immediate future, and the theme is judgment and hardship again. Verse 9 is the turning point: **"Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, that pain seized you like a woman in labor?"** And the final four verses of chapter 4 stress that God's judgment against the unfaithfulness of Israel is merely a prelude to the greatest blessing of all. The Lord has a *plan*, according to verse 12. A time will come, Micah says, when Zion will emerge triumphant (v. 13) **"and [people] shall devote their gain to the LORD, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth."**

That brings us to the immediate context of our verse. Chapter 5, verse 1, is a call to *battle*—and this is clearly describing a battle that will prove costly to Judah. **"Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek."**

Commentators are divided on what that text refers to. Some think it's a reference to the famous siege of Jerusalem that occurred during Micah's lifetime, when (according to 2 Kings 18) the king of Assyria, Sennacherib, came with great armies, ravaged all of Judah, and laid siege to Jerusalem, utterly humiliating Hezekiah. Hezekiah paid him off with gold stripped from the Temple. But then a year later, Sennacherib sent a vile and insulting message to Hezekiah, threatening to destroy Judah completely and make the people eat their own bodily waste and drink their own urine. (I won't read you that message, but the full story is in 2 Kings 18.) In the end, the Lord intervened supernaturally and defeated Sennacherib's armies, without any

help whatsoever from the armies of Judah. Second Kings 19:34-35 tells what happened: "**And that night the angel of the LORD went out and struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians. And when people arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies. Then Sennacherib king of Assyria departed and went home and lived at Nineveh.**"

So that brought a quick end to that threat. Some commentators say the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib is what Micah 5:1 refers to. I don't think so. I believe this is a prophecy that looks beyond Hezekiah's era at least another hundred years into the future, foretelling what Nebuchadnezzar would do to the last king of Judah, a king named Zedekiah.

Look again at Micah 5:1: "**Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek.**" "The judge of Israel" is a reference to the king. Smiting someone on the cheek was a terrible insult. Smiting someone on the cheek with a rod added *injury* to the insult. And that's exactly what Nebuchadnezzar did to Zedekiah when he sent all Judah into captivity.

According to 2 Kings 24:18-20, Nebuchadnezzar had tried to set Zedekiah up as a puppet king over Judah, but Zedekiah, who was both wicked *and* dumb, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Second Kings 25 describes Nebuchadnezzar's reaction: "**In the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came with all his army against Jerusalem and laid siege to it. And they built siegeworks all around it. So the city was besieged till the eleventh year of King Zedekiah.**" This, I am convinced, was the siege Micah prophesied in Micah 5:1. Listen to 2 Kings 25:6-9:

[Nebuchadnezzar's armies] **captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and they passed sentence on him.**

7 They slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains and took him to Babylon.

8 In the fifth month, on the seventh day of the month—that was the nineteenth year of King Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon—Nebuzaradan, the captain of the bodyguard, a servant of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem.

9 And he burned the house of the LORD and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem; every great house he burned down

Verse 25 says, "**So Judah was taken into exile out of its land.**"

That represented the final, catastrophic failure of the Davidic line of kings in Judah. No earthly king has ever sat on the throne of David from that day until now. Zedekiah therefore epitomized the very worst of that line of kings and his defeat represented the low point in the dynasty—more than the low point, but the end of it as far as human history is concerned.

So you might expect Micah 5:1 to be followed by another long lamentation and expression of intense woe.

Instead, what we have is this glorious Messianic promise—one of the great Old Testament texts about the event we celebrate at Christmas. Micah's prophecy about the end of the Davidic dynasty in the backslidden nation of Judah thus leads to this amazing prophecy about the One who would restore that throne and build an even greater Messianic kingdom.

Now I want to walk through the actual text with you and point out its key elements in overview fashion, and then we'll outline the prophecy that's given to us in this text with three things about Christ I hope you can keep in mind throughout this holiday season.

So look once more at the text, phrase by phrase.

First, notice the conjunction that links it to the preceding prophecy about the collapse of the Davidic dynasty. Verse 1: "**with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek** But—"

That conjunction is monumental. After any prophecy of doom or judgment, it's always nice to hear the word *but*. It signifies a radical change of direction. When Christ says to the wicked in the end, "**Depart from me, all you workers of evil!**"—there won't be any *ifs ands* or *buts*. In this case, however, the word *but* ends the prophecy of judgment and introduces a promise that is infinitely more profound in its glory than all the measures of woe that were filled up in the catastrophe of the Babylonian Captivity.

"**But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah . . .**" The town is called that to distinguish it from a different Bethlehem, spoken of in Joshua 19:15. The other Bethlehem was in the territory belonging to Zebulun. *Bethlehem* means "house of bread"—which is fitting for the birthplace of the bread of life. *Ephrathah* means "fruitful," but the name is derived from the Ephrathites, a clan in the tribe of Judah who owned the land around Bethlehem. That was David's clan, according to 1 Samuel 17:12: "**David was the son of an Ephrathite of Bethlehem in Judah, named Jesse, who had eight sons.**" So there was no question about what town Micah's prophecy referred to. "**Bethlehem Ephrathah**" was none other than David's hometown—so it was fitting (and not entirely unexpected, but this prophecy made it official) that the greatest of all Israel's rulers and the ultimate heir to David's throne would come from there as well. Obviously, a promise like that was uplifting to the heart of any true believer.

"**You, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah . . .**" That expression emphasizes the humbleness and insignificance of the town. Though small, Bethlehem had a long and interesting history in the Bible. This is where Rachel was buried. It's where Naomi and Ruth settled when Naomi came back from Moab. One of the lesser-known judges, Izban, was from Bethlehem and was buried there. So the town had a history, but it was a humble, unimpressive place—and it still is, even to this day.

"You, O Bethlehem . . . from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel." Now we begin to hear the clear messianic significance of the text. This is a special ruler—"One." *The One* "who is to be ruler in Israel. A special ruler, and we know it from the final phrase of the verse: "**whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.**" There's a clear note of eternity in that expression. It's the kind of terminology reserved for language about God. The term "**of old**" is idiomatic as a reference to eternity. It's used in Proverbs 8:22-23. The speaker here is a personification of wisdom, which means it's really symbolic of Christ. And the proverb says: "**The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.**"

This is one of the greatest clues we have from the Old Testament about the deity of the Messiah. Micah is using language normally reserved to describe God, and he is speaking about this coming ruler, the consummate king, the Redeemer of David's dynasty, and the true fulfillment of every promise in the Davidic covenant. And I think there's a very large and deliberate hint here that the Messiah would be God incarnate.

So there's a progression in the verse that takes us from the idea of humble insignificance to that which is of eternal and infinite significance; someone—*the One*—whose goings forth have been from eternity.

And that is how, in these few short words, Micah gives us three different aspects of the Messiah. Put them together and you have a full-orbed description of the glory of Christ. What are the three perspectives?

First, we see a glimpse of Christ in His humility as a man—born in an insignificant setting without the usual trappings of royalty. Second, we Christ in His power as a King—*the One* who was born to be Ruler in Israel, and the verses that follow make

clear that He will be a perfect, unconquerable Ruler who, in the words of verse 4, "**shall be great to the ends of the earth.**" Then third, we see Him in His majesty as God—the One who inhabits eternity.

And I want to look at each of those facets of Christ's glory with you this morning.

(OK. That was my introduction. As sometimes is the case, the introduction is much longer than the rest will be. So buckle in and let's look at these three pictures of the Messiah, each of which give insight into His character.) First,

1. HE IS A HUMBLE MAN

Now, don't miss this. Both the Messiah's humanity and His humility are underscored by the announcement of where He would be born. The fact that He would come from Bethlehem clearly signifies that He would be *born* there as an infant. Both Matthew 2:6 and John 7:42 reveal that this is precisely how the leading Old Testament scholars of Jesus' time understood Micah's prophecy. It's about the Messiah's birthplace.

Obviously, His humanity is assumed rather than explicitly declared in this promise. Many other messianic promises described Him as the seed of Abraham, the offspring of David, the Rod of Jesse, the son of man—and similar expressions. It was well known that He would come from David's bloodline and therefore no one would ever have doubted or questioned His humanity. So it wasn't necessary to declare the fact explicitly. It was sufficient to name His birthplace.

And the humble humanity of the Messiah is clearly an important aspect of this prophecy. Born in this fairly obscure town whose only real claim to fame is that it was the birthplace of David—David, who himself rose from humble obscurity to be king of Israel (in somewhat better times). The Messiah would emerge in similar fashion.

Now, we have studied the humanity of Christ several times over the years here in GraceLife. I have done at least two or three messages stressing the full and true humanity of Christ; Don Green has taught on the subject. Jesus' humanity, of course, is one of the central themes of Christmas—the incarnation—that Christ divested Himself of His heavenly glory and came to earth in the most humble of circumstances.

In the words of Philippians 2:6-8, **"Though he was in the form of God, [he] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."**

It was humbling enough for God to step out of heaven and enter the world of human men *as a man*. But he kept humbling himself until He literally could not be humbled any more. He did not come to earth in an exalted fashion, like you might expect of a king. Instead, he made Himself a servant—the lowly son of a working man in a family too poor and too lacking in clout to find adequate accommodations on the night of His birth.

You know, in Mary's condition you might think any compassionate woman in town would have gladly welcomed her into the warmth and privacy of a home, but no one did. The only place Jesus' parents could find to lay their newborn Son was a filthy feeding-trough for cattle.

Jesus humbled Himself throughout His whole life—serving others, working the works of God obediently—becoming obedient even to the point of death. And it was not the celebrated death of a beloved king. It was the most painful, ignominious, humiliating death the cruelest executioners of Rome could devise.

If you could single out one expression to sum up the whole character of Christ's life as a man, I think it would be *righteousness*—perfect righteousness. He was always obedient, fulfilling God's law to the letter, doing what Adam (even in his

unfallen state) could never do—and certainly what none of Adam's fallen offspring could ever do. He lived life to absolute perfection—demonstrating with His very life what the expression *righteousness* means and what true righteousness looks like.

But if you further sum up in one adjective what that perfection looked like to those who observed Christ and walked with Him during His earthly ministry—if you could describe the single most profound and outstanding and surprising feature of Jesus' human righteousness—I think the word you would have to go to would have to be *humble*.

And that is reflected in our text—we have a powerful glimpse of Jesus' humility as a man. He was a humble man from His birth till His death—the most humble person who ever walked the earth.

Here's a second perspective on the glory of Christ I see in our text:

2. HE IS A POWERFUL RULER

Christ entered this world, just as Micah prophesied, in the most humble, unpretentious, ordinary fashion. (Well, not really "ordinary," because it's a great deal more humble than "ordinary" to have a feeding trough full of hay be your first bed.) And yet, Jesus came as a *king*. Micah calls Him The "**one who is to be ruler in Israel.**" In Matthew 2:2, the Wise Men called Him "**he who has been born king of the Jews.**" Now Spurgeon made a point about that expression I don't think I have ever considered. He pointed out that in the realm of human government practically no one is *born* as a king. In dynasties such as we see in England, they're born princes, like the Prince of Wales, and they don't become kings until the reigning monarch dies.

I suppose it would be *possible* for an English king to be born to the King's throne if his father died just before his birth—but I

don't know that it's ever happened, and it certainly isn't the usual pattern.

In Jesus' case, regardless of the humble circumstances surrounding His birth, all heaven recognized Him as the ultimate royalty—not just *a* king, but "**King of kings and Lord of lords.**" And both divine providence and angelic intervention saw to it that He received heaven's honor and recognition, even though practically the whole world lay mute in solemn stillness.

There was a massive host of angels in Luke 2:13-14, "**praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'**" There were also foreign dignitaries, the Magi, who brought symbolic gifts befitting royalty. (I think it's amazing, by the way, that the Magi, who were quite accustomed to being in the presence of royalty, were not the least bit confused or put off by the fact that they found Jesus in an ordinary house, in very humble circumstances, without any recognition or praise from the nation over whom He reigned. The wise men didn't back away from their mission or question the credentials of Christ; they eagerly gave Him the worship that was due Him.)

I'm convinced by my reading of Scripture that one day yet future, Jesus will literally fulfill His role as King of Kings—through an earthly reign from David's throne in Jerusalem. And I believe that's precisely what Revelation 20, Micah chapter 4, and a host of other Old Testament passages are describing. That's the millennial kingdom, which is yet to come.

But don't let your eschatology diminish Jesus' position as "**King of kings and Lord of lords.**" That's not just some far-off future reality for a different dispensation. Jesus is *also* reigning over a spiritual kingdom right now, from the Father's right hand. And more than that, He was the rightful king of Israel, even during His first advent. He was *born* a king, with all power at His disposal even then. And even while he was on trial in front of an

earthly king and a Roman governor, He was reigning with full authority over a vast, eternal kingdom—which He Himself said is a kingdom that is not of this world.

Don't miss that point. Don't imagine for a minute that being born in such humble circumstances diminished Jesus' kingly power and authority, or that he is still waiting to be given authority on earth. When Paul says in Philippians 2:7 that Jesus **"made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men,"** he is not saying that the incarnation somehow diminished Christ's glory or power. The New American Standard translation of Philippians 2:7 says He **"emptied Himself,"** and I really don't like of that choice of words. It implies something the text does not say. Jesus didn't divest Himself of any of His eternal power or attributes. He temporarily laid aside the *use* of some of those attributes. He cloaked His glory with humanity and with humility. But he didn't actually shed the glory or divest Himself of the power. He didn't *lose* any of the attributes of His deity. He just didn't *use* them freely and independently as a man.

In other words, although Jesus was fully man, he remained fully God. And the words of our text actually underscore the fact of His deity. In fact, that's perspective number three I want to consider. First, He is a humble Man. Second, He is a powerful ruler. Now third:

3. HE IS A MAJESTIC GOD

I love the way the deity of Christ is expressed in this phrase: "[The One] whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." It stresses the fact that the birth of Christ in Bethlehem was not the beginning of Christ as the God's Son and our Sovereign. He is eternal. He "came forth" from Bethlehem, but He did not come from there in the first place. His "**goings forth are from of old, From everlasting**"—to use the words of the New King James Version.

Notice also that the words of this prophecy are spoken directly by God the Father. Some clear threads of Trinitarian doctrine are woven into the fabric of the text. God the Father is speaking, and in speaking about the One who would come forth out of Bethlehem, He says this: "**from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.**"

Don't miss the importance of those two words "**for Me.**" God the father is *sending* this eternal person to be born and to rule and to redeem His people, and to make righteousness reign over all the earth.

The language is reminiscent of John 3:16: "**For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.**" And a host of other similar New Testament expressions. John 10:36: "**The Father consecrated [His Son] and sent [Him] into the world.**" Galatians 4:4: "**when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law.**" 1 John 4:9: "**In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.**" And verse 10: "**In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.**" And just a few verses later, 1 John 4:14: "**We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.**"

That is the gospel, and it's imbedded into our text, too. Christ—God the Son—came to this earth at the behest of God the

Father, on a mission of mercy and redemption. He calls us to repent of our sins and believe in Him—and He does all the work of redemption Himself. It's not up to us to atone for our own sin—we simply lay hold of His grace by faith.

As a *humble Man*, He fulfilled the righteous demands of God in our place—living a perfect life, and then bearing the shame, the reproach, and the punishment of sin on behalf of all who will believe.

As a *powerful Ruler*, He exercises dominion over our hearts. In the case of those who believe, that means He lovingly manages our sanctification—conforming us to His own likeness. For those who try to live in rebellion against His authority, He will exercise His kingly authority in judgment. In the words of John 5:22-23, **"The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him."**

As our *glorious God*, Christ is supremely worthy of our earnest praise and worship. And that's why we pause each year to remember His birth at Christmas.

I hope during this coming week and the year that follows, you will see Him as a humble man, and strive to imitate that humility. May you also see Him as a powerful ruler, and yield completely to His authority. And let's also acknowledge Him as our glorious God and worship Him with full hearts, confessing that He is in truth **"King of kings and Lord of lords."**

Heavenly Father we are so grateful for the work of Christ, who (as our text says) "came forth for You"—to be ruler in Israel, Lord over our hearts, and humble savior of our souls. May we trust Him and follow Him with devoted hearts, and may His glory shine in our lives and testimonies during this holiday season, we pray.