

**Micah 5: 2-5a; “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah”, A  
Christmas Sermon for December 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013, delivered in the  
Morning Worship Service by Pastor Paul Rendall.**

Out of seemingly small and insignificant things come great and mighty things. This is one of the great principles of truth which those who know the Lord should remember and live their lives by it. The Lord sometimes delights to bring a man out of obscurity in order to do a great work in the society in which he lives. How much more so in the giving of His own beloved Son. Everything that has anything to do with His Only-Begotten has significance in His sight. Even the city in which He would be born - Bethlehem. Bethlehem is small but significant. Bethlehem may be a small and insignificant place in the eyes of men, but God chose her to be the place where His Son would be born into this world. The greatest man, the most holy man, the most loving man who has ever lived came from Bethlehem. And so I believe that we who are believers and also all who would become believers should take cognizance of Bethlehem Ephratha. She is little, but she is not despised by God. Rather, she is honored. And so too, we may be little but we are not despised by God, because He has given us His Son to save us from our sins. Let us take notice this morning of what God desires to show us in relation to the birth of His Son. What is the significance of Bethlehem to all believers everywhere in all generations? That is the question that we are asking this morning. The answer is that the significance of Bethlehem is all related to knowing Christ in the following ways. There are 4 of them from this text.

**1st- Out of Bethlehem Christ came forth unto God according to His Divine Decree.**

You would think that when God was about to do His greatest work that He would pick a great and notable place to have it begin. Instead He picked little Bethlehem. Our text says, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel.” It will be a good thing for you to understand; it will do you good all of your life to understand, that God’s plan for each of His people is that from littleness comes greatness. Let us understand this morning, and note it very carefully, that our salvation was the plan and the work of the Triune God from the beginning of the word. When He creates any man, He has a purpose in doing so. God’s plan for His Only-Begotten Son was that He would be great to the ends of the earth. But this plan, as it began to be outworked in the Incarnation would involve Christ’s greatness coming about through the veiling of His glory. His greatness would not immediately be seen by people at His birth. This greatness been in eternity past, in the counsels between the Father and the Son. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit took counsel together. In this counsel, at which no man was present, God the Son agreed to take upon Himself the form of a man and the form of a servant. This was the plan of the Father for Him. God the Son was begotten of the Father from all eternity; His goings forth are from of old, from eternity. The 2nd person of the Trinity did not set out from heaven on His own, but of out of love for fallen sinners, He was sent by the Father, in the fullness of time, and accompanied by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus Christ “came forth to Me”, the Father says in this text. “His goings”, His procession from heaven to earth, “were from of old, from everlasting.” “From the days of eternity,” it literally reads. It was from all eternity that our Lord Jesus thought of the children of men and had His delight in the sons of men. In Jesus Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge it says in Colossians 2: 3. But turn over with me to Proverbs 8, verse 22. Here we find wisdom personified speaking about that time before the world was made. It says, “The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old.” “I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth.” “When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no fountains abounding with water.” “Before the

mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth; while as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, or the primal dust of the world.” When He prepared the heavens, I was there when He drew a circle on the face of the deep, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep, when He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters would transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth, Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.”

These verses obviously refer to a Person with God, who was God, and was beside Him as a “Master Craftsman”. Here was a Person Who was daily the Father’s delight. Here was One who is described for us as being, “always before Him, rejoicing in His inhabited world and whose delight was with the sons of men”. I would suggest to you that this can be none other than the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ. But I want you to see, and to understand this morning that if you are looking to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, that the Lord Jesus has as much delight in you now, as He did when men were first created at the foundation of the world. He rejoices in you to do you good. He came into the world to save sinners, and it was His joy to be able to suffer, to bleed, and to die for you at the cross. Do you understand, dear believer, that He is the Author and Perfecter of your faith? And that it was “for the joy that was set before Him that He endured the cross and despised the shame?” His joy was in realizing what His sufferings would accomplish for you. Here in verse 32 of Proverbs 8, there is an application for us. “Now therefore, listen to me, my children, for blessed are those who keep my ways.” “Hear instruction and be wise, and do not disdain it.” “Blessed is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors.” “For whoever finds me find life, and obtains favor from the Lord.” Let me ask you whether you are delighting in the One who delights in you? Ah, this is so very pleasing to Him and to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. Do you see the great love and care that He has for your life and spiritual well-being? Then will you not spend time with Him, listening to Him speak to you through His word? Will you watch and wait, each and every day to have fellowship with Him? How blessed are those who keep His ways.

But do you not also see the Father in these verses as well; His making all His plans, His being interested in all the details, not of only creation, but of redemption as well? And Who was it that formed the Lord Jesus in the womb of Mary? Who was it that insured that everything that was fashioned in her womb was perfect human nature? Who was it that brought together this sinless human nature with the Divine, all-glorious 2nd Person of the Trinity? It was the Father, the 1<sup>st</sup> Person of the Divine Trinity together with the Holy Spirit, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of the Divine Trinity. And so we must then go further and ask ourselves: Who was it that led Jesus into the Wilderness to be tempted by the Devil? It was the Holy Spirit. And Who was it who was there in the Lord Jesus at the cross, reconciling the world to Himself? It was the Father. And then we should be easily able to come to this conclusion: It was God who providentially ordered this marvelous set of circumstances that led to Caesar Augustus’ making a decree that all the Roman world be taxed. And when He did so, everyone, even Joseph and Mary had to go to their home town to be registered. Do you see God in all of these things happening, just at this time? Do you believe in the decrees of God? I am asserting to you from our text that it was because there was a Divine decree in place, it was because there was a providential ordering of events that was going on, that Jesus was born in that time and that place of Bethlehem. It was God’s decree which established the human emperor’s decree, without in the least violating the emperor’s will to choose to do this thing. Luke 2: 4 says, “Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.” “So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.” “And she brought forth her first born Son, and wrapped Him in a swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

There was no room for Jesus there in the inn, but He was the apple of His Father God's eye; He is His very heart. He is His eternal purpose in terms of our salvation and yet there was no room for Him there in Bethlehem's inn. Out of Bethlehem Christ came forth unto God, to fulfill His altogether holy purpose, even when there were so few people who knew what it meant. Out of little things in men's sight come great things in God's sight. It was so in Bethlehem when Christ was born.

**2ndly- The significance of Bethlehem is that out of Bethlehem Christ came forth as a Ruler in Israel.** (Verse 2b)

"Out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel." When Christ was born in Bethlehem He was born a King. It is not that He was made a King when He was born. There was no room for Him in the inn, and He came to His own but His own did not receive Him. No, He had been a King since before His birth and shall be a king forever. Psalm 29: 10 says, "The Lord sat enthroned at the Flood, and the Lord sits as King forever." Certainly Jesus Christ is the King of glory and has been from all eternity. The angels say to the shepherds when Jesus is born, "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." He is Christ the Lord. He is a king. In Matthew 2: 2 when the wise men from the East come to Jerusalem they say, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?" This is the way that He was born. Listen to Spurgeon on this. "Very few have ever been born king." "Men are born princes, but they are seldom born kings." "I do not think you can find an instance in history where any infant was born king." "There was the prince of Wales, who had to wait a number of years, till his father died, and then they manufactured him into a king, by putting a crown on his head, but he was not born a king." "I remember no one who was born a king except Jesus." "There is emphatic meaning in that verse that we sing - "Born thy people to deliver; born a child and yet a king." (end of quote)

Let us understand, the reality of this blessed truth; that when Christ comes into the hearts of His people, when they call upon His name, He comes in as their King and Lord. He comes not only to save, but also to rule over His people. He is the only Mediator between God and man and yet His is a mediatorial kingdom. He is reigning now and yet He is yet to reign in a greater sense, in us, in the years to come. Ask yourself whether your loyalty and love and sense of duty to this ruler of your heart is something which is alive and growing? Is He ruling over your heart or not? He came to rule over Israel and yet not all Israel is spiritual Israel. You can know whether Christ is ruler over your heart by whether you love His Word and keep His commandments, whether you are ruled by His laws because you love Him. For the Christian there is this compelling reality of loving your liege Lord; there is this longing to make progress in that proving that loyalty to yourself and to Him. Do you, in the secret place of your heart, study to promote His kingdom and its progress there? Do you declare your loyalty to Christ when you are around other people. Ask yourself if this is your desire, the supreme desire of your heart? Ask yourself, "Is this my freedom, to do love Him with all my heart, and do what He commands?" Then, truly, you are enlisted in His holy army and are one of His loyal holy subjects.

I hope that you can see and understand from the Scriptures that there is, and will be, progress in Christ's kingdom in your heart as you exercise faith in Him. And I hope that you are convinced by the history of the Church and by all the prophecies in the Scriptures, that there has been and there will be in the future, also, progress in Christ's kingdom among the nations. Jesus is reigning over His Church now; over all of God's Elect people, now. But all who believe in the Lord Jesus also should acknowledge His reign among the nations and the kingdoms of this world as well. He is most certainly the King of the nations now. And yet, we should understand that He will come to reign in a greater sense spiritually in the future among the nations at God's appointed time. As we look around us, we see that the nations are now deceived, for the most part. They are under the sway of the evil one. As we look as God's ancient people the Jews, we

see that they have been under the awful deception that Jesus is not their king, for some 2000 years. A partial hardening, or “blindness in part”, has happened to them, it says in Romans 11: 25, “until the “fullness of the Gentiles comes in”. But the prophetic word, in the book that we are reading from this morning, says that this will change someday and Christ will reign, He must come to reign, in a more glorious sense over His ancient people the Jews, and over the nations in a day to come. The Jews shall be savingly brought to Christ someday, and brought into the church. They shall be grafted in to the Church and Christ shall reign over them gloriously. You see this in Micah 4: 6-8. “In that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame, I will gather the outcast and those whom I have afflicted; I will make the lame a remnant and the outcast a strong nation; So the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion from now on, even forever.” Christ’s reigning over them as a nation which God will save and bring into the Church will be a great witness to all the other nations of the earth; all those nations who are still for the most part sitting in the darkness of unbelief and sin. “For He must reign until He puts all His enemies under His feet.” (1 Corinthians 15: 25) And the Father says to the Son, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of your enemies.” (Psalm 110: 1, 2) But Christ’s rule began back there in Bethlehem where the wise men came to worship him, even when the rulers of Israel would not. The Magi would bow before Him, and they would give Him their gifts even when the rulers of Israel would not. Ask yourself now; do my knees bow before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords?

**3rdly- It was out of Bethlehem that the effects of Christ’s birth would be felt.**

I take this from verse 3 where it says, “Therefore He shall give them up, until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; then the remnant of His brethren shall return to the children of Israel.” God had determined to give His people up to the captivity under Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonians for 70 years; and then their captivity would end. Israel would be like a woman in travail and labor until that time was ended and they could return. But this prophecy also points on forward to the time when Mary would give birth to Jesus. Because it is His birth, His incarnation that is the basis of all of our deliverance from the captivity that sin brings us into. Look at Micah 4: 9, 10. “Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in your midst? Has your counselor perished? For pangs have seized you like a woman in labor. Be in pain, and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in birth pangs. For now you shall go forth from the city, you shall dwell in the field and to Babylon you shall go. There you shall be delivered; there the Lord will redeem you from the hand of your enemies.” It was not only the disobedient people of Judah and Jerusalem that were in captivity due to their sin. We need to see that it is all men in all places. And God gives people up to their sinfulness, if they refuse to repent, in order to show them the awful effects that sin brings, and the separation from all of His goodness and blessing that results from their holding on to it. The whole world was held in bondage to sin, captive to sin and Satan, until the time that Mary had given birth. Galatians 4: 3 says, “Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law that we might receive the adoption as sons. Paul, there, is speaking of Jews under the guardianship of the law, which was a tutor to lead them to Christ. But he was also speaking to all men in regard to Christ’s redeeming each one who believes, from the bondage that they come into by their trying to be justified by their own works and their own ideas of how they might be saved and please God.

Bethlehem in its history as a city has sometimes been associated with the sorrows of death. We are told in Genesis 35: 16 and 17, that Bethlehem was a place of sorrow to Jacob’s wife Rachel. It says there that, “She labored in childbirth and she had hard labor”. “And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, ‘Do not fear; you will have this son also.’ “And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died) that she called his name Ben-

Oni; but his father called him Benjamin”. Listen to Spurgeon once again: “Might not Mary have called her own son Jesus her Ben-Oni; for he was to be the child of sorrow.” “Simeon said to her, “Yea a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.” “But while she might have called him Ben-Oni, what did God his Father call him?” “Benjamin, the son of my right hand.” “Ben-Oni was he, as a man; Benjamin as to his Godhead.” “This little incident seems to be almost a prophecy that Ben-Oni - Benjamin, the Lord Jesus, should be born in Bethlehem.” (end of quote)

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem and the wise men came looking and asking for Him, Herod the King looked and asked too; but for a far different reason. He wanted to kill Jesus when he said that he wanted to worship Him. He heard this same prophecy read to him and yet He remained hardened in hatred in his heart toward the little King Jesus who had come to save sinners. “He sent forth and put to death,” it says in Matthew 2: 16, “all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under”. Bethlehem became the place of mourning, Rachel weeping for her children. I am told that Bethlehem the name, has two meanings. It means, “the house of bread”, and it means “the house of war”. And so this is very appropriate for us here today. Being born in Bethlehem either Jesus Christ is the bread of life to your soul and you spiritually are alive because of Him, and you feed upon His faithfulness and His words, as you come to dwell in His house; or you are in the house of war against Him. You defend yourself from thinking that you need to be converted to Christ. Christ has said that He has not come to bring peace but a sword; and because a person does not want Him, or see their need of Him, they actually fight against Him as God’s enemies. But listen, you do not have to be in the house of war today. Lay down your arms; break off your sins, and see that He did not come into the world to condemn the world, but that the world would be saved by Him. Come to Bethlehem and see, Christ the Lord the newborn King. And out of Bethlehem the effects of His birth shall be felt by you. This is why He came; to take away the sorrow and bring Joy to your world! Come to Christ and all your sins shall be forgiven. Christ will be born in you! **4thly and finally- Out of Bethlehem would come Christ, the great Shepherd of God’s sheep.** (Verses 4, 5a)

It says, “And He shall stand and feed His flock in the strength of the Lord, In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth.” Beginning at Bethlehem, Christ would spread out and be great to the ends of the earth. The reason for His greatness is that He would be the Great Shepherd of His sheep, His believing people. He would shepherd them through His under-shepherds, His apostles, who were “the remnant of His brethren” who would return and preach to the children of Israel. This is how He would feed and shepherd His flock. This is how He would begin to build His church. He stands in the midst of His churches. He feeds them spiritual bread in His house. The ministry goes on in His strength. The majesty of His Name is seen. And His people abide; that is, they remain in the faith, and they continue in the faith because He keeps them in their faith. Therefore, to Him belongs all the glory. “He shall be great to the ends of the earth, for He is our peace”. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. And this is the message which came to shepherds who were pasturing their flocks outside of Bethlehem that night that Jesus was born. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” This is the significance of Bethlehem Ephrathah. Out of her Christ came forth unto God. Out of her Christ came forth as a Ruler in Israel. Out of her the effects of Christ’s birth would be felt. And out of her would come Christ as the great Shepherd of God’s sheep. May the Lord bless you richly this Christmas season, with these blessed truths.