

Sunday 17th December 2023

Hope for Small beginnings

Scripture: Micah 5:2–5

What a wonderful song we just sang – O Little town of Bethlehem. The words of this carol were written by Phillip Brooks, a pastor of the Holy Trinity Episcopal church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania from 1869 to 1891. In 1865 he went on a pilgrimage, riding a horse between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, arriving Christmas Eve. This hymn echoes the truth of Scripture concerning the birth of Christ. Specifically, it speaks of two great things concerning the birth of Jesus.



1. Christ's Birth Was According to a Divine Plan

Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1–6). In verse 2, the town is referred to as "small" in the NIV, and "little" in the KJV. Bethlehem was a little town.

Bethlehem is a small Palestinian city located in the central West Bank, about 10km south of Jerusalem. It is identified as the city of David, where he was crowned as king of Israel and the birthplace of Jesus.

Bethlehem was small in the eyes of men, but by the power of God and within the plan of God, Bethlehem was going to be part of something very big – the coming of the Messiah into the world!

That is the essence of this great Christmas song –the big event which God brought about through a small, seemingly insignificant town – Bethlehem.

I was watching an orchestra playing on YouTube and I found it very interesting. The conductor arrives, the music begins, and I noticed a man sitting on the left-hand side. He wasn't playing and I wondered why, until, during a crucial time in the music, he plays one note. Once more the orchestra plays and the one-note man sits quietly throughout the rest of the concert until he is called upon to play his one note again. One note only! It may be that our part in life's work may be very small . . . but even that is important.

Bethlehem had only one note to play in the orchestration of God's redemptive plan, but it was an important one! God still works this way today. In many unassuming ways and unassuming people, God is at work to carry out His work in this world.

The problem with too many of us is that we believe we are not big enough to be used of God." Are you making the mistake of bypassing "little" opportunities, because you're looking for some "big" responsibility to fall into your lap? We would do well to pay heed to the advice of F.B. Meyer, who said, "Do not wait to do a great thing. The opportunity may never come. But since little things are constantly claiming your attention, do them for a great motive – for the glory of God."

How much of God's work goes undone today, because we fail to recognize what great purposes God wants to carry out through the small things, He calls us to do?

2. Christ would be born in an unusual way.

The prophet speaks about the fact that the coming Messiah would be one whose "origins are from of old, from ancient times." Jesus fulfilled this prophecy (John 1:1; 14). There is a similarity between Micah's prophecy here about the Messiah's birth and that of Isaiah. Indeed, the Saviour was born in an unusual way – He was born of a virgin. And he was born as a man. The divine put on humanity. The enormity of what took place that night in Bethlehem escaped the notice of many on earth, but it was something of which the entire population of heaven was aware according to our song.

When did the sacrifice of Christ for our sins begin? Did it begin at Calvary? No, you must go back further than that. Did it begin in Gethsemane? No, further back still. Did it begin in the upper room with the last supper? No. Did it begin when Jesus determined to journey to Jerusalem, knowing He would lose His life there? No. When did the sacrifice of Christ for our sins begin? In eternity past, when He decided to leave His throne in heaven and come to earth as a man to pay the penalty for our sins.

When Christ became a man through the incarnation, he voluntarily limited what to him was the most precious thing in the world: unhampered, unhindered communion with the Father

3. Christ's Birth Makes Possible A New Person.

There are two ways in which the birth of Christ makes possible a new person. As verse 3 of "O Little Town Of Bethlehem" puts it, just as Christ was born in Bethlehem, He can be born into our hearts today. And by virtue of Christ being in us, God declares our standing before Him to be that of being in Christ, which means we are seen by God to be a new person.

What are the benefits: We will benefit from God's guidance; from God's greatness, from God's goodness and His peace.

In a certain European town, there was a cathedral which was chiefly notable for a large and rather beautiful stained-glass window behind its altar. One winter day a great tempest shattered the window, into a thousand pieces. These were put into a large box, which was placed in the basement.

Some time later a stranger asked if he might have the fragments. Since there appeared to be no use for them, the custodians of the cathedral gave him permission to take them. About two years later these same custodians were invited by a famed artisan to come to a showing of his work in a nearby village. They accepted and when the artist unveiled his work in their presence, it was a stained-glass window created from the very pieces of the splintered glass that had composed the original window, but of far greater beauty.

The minister who told this story made a rather obvious and very good application. If your plans and dreams have been destroyed by some outward circumstance, trust in God. Perhaps the very best place for those dreams was the rubbish pile, for God may

have better plans for you after all. He will bring them to pass through His own Son, who gives you, in your entirely new life, dreams and plans fashioned in a much better way than you could do for yourself.

The prophet speaks beyond what the Messiah's birth will make possible for the individual to speak of what His coming will mean for all who come to faith in Him. He will make them, collectively, a new person. Under the reign of the Messiah, there will be no distinction between Jew or Gentile, but we are all one in Him.

Micah makes it clear, that this experience of unity among God's people will not be fully realized until the Lord returns, however, it is something God calls us to endeavour to experience in our relationships with one another today.

Two porcupines found themselves in a blizzard and tried to huddle together to keep warm. But because they were pricked by each other's quills, they moved apart. Soon they were shivering again and had to lie side by side once more for their own survival. They needed each other even though they needed each other.

Great things come from small beginnings. This is what we can learn on that first Christmas when Christ was born of humble beginnings and rose to be king of Israel.

Let's finish with a beautiful You-tube story that may awaken your hearts. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WtaZm-H1SC4>