

The Mystery of Bethlehem

By David Harrell

Bible Text: Micah 5:2
Preached on: Sunday, December 18, 2016

I would invite you this morning to take your Bibles and turn to the Old Testament, one of the minor prophets, the prophet Micah, and we will be looking at Micah 5:2. This is a prophecy of the coming Messiah that was made over 700 years before it was actually fulfilled precisely. Micah 5:2. Let me read it to you,

2 But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity.

The history of the Incarnation is filled with marvelous mysteries and captivating drama that really elevates the hearts of the redeemed to increasing heights of worship and praise whenever we think about them, whenever we ponder them, and I wish to do that this morning, to ponder some of the great mysteries this morning that surround this particular passage of Scripture in particular. Some of these things may be new to you, for others, it may be just a reminder, but if they are new to you, might I say that you have been forfeiting some of the blessings that are inherent in some of these great truths.

Let me begin by giving you a bit of history. We just read from the Gospel of Luke a few minutes ago and we learned that an angel of the Lord appeared to a group of shepherds one night as they cared for the sheep on some of the hills that were surrounding Jerusalem, and that would have been a grazing area for the animals that would be sacrificed in the temple sacrifices, and little did they know that the birth of the final sacrifice, the Lamb of God, had just taken place and they were the humble recipients of that angelic announcement. Luke 2:10 says, "'Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.'" And according to Scripture, they immediately went straight to Bethlehem, the city of David which was on the southern slope of Mount Zion just a few miles away, and there Luke tells us that they made known the statement which had been told them about this child. And in verse 19, we read, "And Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart."

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Can you imagine what would have gone through Mary's mind? I'm sure she thought something like this, "I have carried and delivered my Creator, the God of Israel, the God who has been completely unapproachable, transcendent, holy, and he has now come to earth and he has taken on the form of a baby, taken on human flesh, and now I caress and I nurse the God-baby, one who will grow to be the God-man. Here Almighty God is disguised as a helpless infant and here the Ruler of heaven and earth, the Messiah, the Lord God, now squeezes my finger and yet one day he will hold in his hand the royal scepter as the monarch that he is. How can this be?" I'm sure she thought things like that. Astounding.

She would have looked and seen in a feeding trough there the King of Israel, the Messiah. He wasn't in a palace but he's in a stable. And then suddenly she has these shepherds sprinting to see her. I'm sure they were wide-eyed, probably wild-eyed and out of breath, and they can't wait to tell her and Joseph what they had seen. The young maiden had so much to ponder. And I might add, given the praise that she uttered prior to the birth of the Lord Jesus recorded in Luke 1, that section that is so rich in theology, her comprehension of the magnitude of what had just happened could only be explained by the power of the Holy Spirit to help her truly know who God is and understand his word, especially the word of the Old Testament prophets that she would have been aware of. And Mary would have certainly understood that what the shepherds told her was clearly a fulfillment of the prophecy that we have just read here in Micah 5:2, the same one spoken later to the terrified Herod when he inquired of them where the Messiah would be born and the chief priests and the scribes of the people responded by quoting the prophecy of Micah 5:2.

Well, I invite you this morning to join me in pondering this great passage of Scripture and many others that are associated with it, because here the Holy Spirit is going to reveal some astounding truths, some sublime truths, that will certainly bless us and encourage our hearts. Here we are going to learn more about the Christ of Christmas, you know, the one everybody wants to leave out, the one who will come again as King of kings and Lord of lords, and this is such a profound comfort to the redeemed, especially as we all languish in this deteriorating and wicked world that is ruled by fiends and fools. How good it is to know that our King lives and that he is coming again.

Well, there are four categories of revelation that I believe emerge from this text and each of them contain spiritual truths that can help us grasp more of the glories of Christ our Savior and King just a little bit more. We're going to look at the birthplace, the rule, the sending and the eternity of the King. The birthplace. The rule. The sending. And the eternity of the King.

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Now, being good Bible students that we are, we must begin with understanding the context of Micah 5:2 so that we know the authorial intent of the passage so let me give you some of the historical background here when Micah wrote this. The northern kingdom of Israel was about to fall to Assyria when Micah began his ministry which focused primarily on the southern kingdom of Judah where he was from. Now, unlike his contemporary, Isaiah, who addressed the court of Jerusalem, Micah preached to the common folks. The reign of Ahaz had brought spiritual decay to the country. The country was filled with spiritual lethargy and apathy. It was filled with idolatry, even apostasy. They had violated even the most basic tenets of the Mosaic covenant. In fact, in chapter 6 in verse 8, he reminds them of what the Lord required of them and it was this, "to do justice, to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God." But they did none of this and at this time in history, Judah was very prosperous. The culture was marked by affluence. They were perceived around the world and even amongst themselves to be militarily invincible. They were convinced that they were blessed by God but their outward prosperity concealed their inward wickedness and rebellion against God. In fact, in Isaiah 5, the prophet gives us a very graphic description of their corruption which, by the way, is a perfect picture of the exact types of things that we see here in the United States. Judah was characterized there in Isaiah 5, as being a country that was really ruled by materialism and greed and drunkenness, debauchery. They had redefined morality. They called evil good and good evil. The text says that they were haughty and defiant and their leadership and judicial system was corrupt. And worst yet, they fully embraced religious syncretism where you combine different religions into one religion, kind of analogous to our modern-day ecumenical movement. In fact, the Old Testament sacrificial system included the worship of the loathsome Canaanite fertility God, Baal. Even the land was filled with high places where these hideously depraved idolatrous practices took place, and some of them, by the way, you can go to Israel today and you can see them. They still exist as a place where tourists can go and look at.

So God commissioned his servant, Micah, and by the way, Micah means "who is like the Lord?" He commissioned Micah to prophesy to them and his message was basically this: because of your wickedness, God is going to judge you because he is a holy God. But he is also in a covenant relationship with you, with Judah, and so ultimately, even though he's going to judge you, ultimately he is going to establish a kingdom and he is going to install a king who will reign in righteousness. In fact, in chapter 5 here in verse 1, Micah says this, "Now muster yourselves in troops, daughter of troops; They have laid siege against us; With a rod they will smite the judge of Israel on the cheek."

Now, although Assyria was the immediate threat because of what was going on in the northern kingdom, eventually according to 2 Kings chapters 24 and 25, in 586 BC, the Babylonians laid siege to Jerusalem. They burned and plundered and captured King

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Zedekiah who, according to Scripture, did evil in the sight of the Lord. And then in a hideous act of barbarism, they brought him and all of his sons before King Nebuchadnezzar who then slaughtered all of Zedekiah's sons before him and then they put out the king's eyes so that the massacre of his sons would be the last thing that he would ever see. Then they shackled him in bronze fetters and brought him to Babylon.

So this was Micah's inspired prophecy of the impending doom that was going to come upon them because of their sin but this horrific judgment was also followed by a message of hope to the theocracy of Israel, a promise of a future blessing, a promise of God's faithfulness because of his unchanging covenant to their forefathers and this hope is presented in the text before us.

So, first of all with that background, let's look at what God says in his prophecy concerning the birthplace of the King. Again, Micah 5:2, "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel." As we look at the text, we see this word "Ephrathah" means "fruitfulness," it means "abundance," and it was known in that day as a place of beautiful vineyards with abundant fruit and olive groves and so forth, but it is also the ancient name of Bethlehem, Bethlehem meaning "house of bread," and that was used to distinguish it from other towns; in other words, "Ephrathah" was used to distinguish it from other towns that had the same name, such as Bethlehem of Zebulun. And here Micah is referring to Bethlehem where David was born as we look in 1 Samuel 17:12. And already, dear friends, as we look here at this passage of Scripture, we begin to see the initial sketchings, if you will, of what would later become a divine masterpiece. So from this little seemingly insignificant place, too little to be among the clans of Judah, one is going to be born who cares for seemingly insignificant people like you and like me; those who would abide in him as Jesus would say, would bear much fruit like the abundant fruit of that region.

Now, why of all places would the Incarnate King choose to be born in such an insignificant little village, a little place called Bethlehem, just a few miles south of Jerusalem? Why not Rome? Why not Jerusalem? Well, there are two reasons that stand out: one is because Bethlehem was the royal city of ancient days, as you will understand. Since Jesus was born the King of Israel, it was only fitting that he would be born in the city where Israel's great King David had originally been born. Over a thousand years before Messiah the King was born, God made an unconditional covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7, promising him that God would raise up from him a descendant, the coming Messiah, who would establish David's kingdom forever and David was born in Bethlehem. He was promised that this would be an eternal kingdom whereby the whole

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world would be blessed through the coming seed of David. So this was a promise that was given to David that literally left him in speechless awe.

But secondly, Bethlehem's history is a picture of the coming Messiah. It's interesting, the term "Bethlehem," the name "Bethlehem" has a double meaning. It means "house or place of bread," but it also means "house or place of fighting and war." And as you think about the symbolism here, we know that bread is the symbol of life in Scripture, remember like the manna from heaven that God used to feed his covenant people in the wilderness. And did not Jesus say in John 6, "The bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world. I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger." And as we look at the other aspect of the meaning of "Bethlehem," that of fighting and war, we know that fighting and war produces sorrow and death and both of these characterized the Savior King, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief. In fact, conflict was his daily fare as well as all who followed him, all who serve him even to this day. And as you think about it, when a man eats of the bread of life, he declares war on Satan and the world, right? That's what happens when we come to Christ. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth, I did not come to bring peace but a sword, for I came to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man's enemies will be the members of his household," Matthew 10:34 through 36. So both life and death marked the past and the future history of Bethlehem.

Now, let me give you some more history of Bethlehem. If we go back into the Old Testament all the way back to the book of Genesis in chapter 35, there we learn that God changed Jacob's name to Israel and he said to him, "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations will come from you and kings shall come from you. The land which I give to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you and I will give the land to your descendants after you." And on the heels of that covenant, we read how Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel, died in childbirth and she was buried in Bethlehem. And what's fascinating is that as Rachel was about to die, she named her son Ben-oni, meaning "son of my sorrow." But Jacob said, "No, no, no. I want to name him Benjamin," which means "son of my right hand." And Benjamin was one of Jacob's 12 sons and eventually from Jacob's son, Judah, came King David and ultimately the greater King, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. What a marvelous picture we have here of the greater Son that would be born to Mary in that same place where Rachel died. As you think about it, like Rachel, Mary could have called her son Ben-oni meaning "son of my sorrow," but God the Father had a different plan and he would ascribe to him an even greater name of honor, even a name beyond Benjamin, "son of my right hand," he would call him Jesus which means "he saves," or "Yahweh is salvation," and now that Son is seated at the right hand of the Father. Peter said in Acts 4:12, "and there is salvation in no

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one else," no other name, "for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

So it was in Bethlehem where Rachel agonized in the birth of Benjamin, a place that became a symbol of the painful waiting of the sons of Israel for their promised Messiah, and Rachel was really the ancestress of the northern tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh through Joseph, and Benjamin in the south. And when the Babylonians later came to carry them off into exile, the Lord spoke through Jeremiah in chapter 31, verse 15, and said, "A voice is heard in Ramah, Lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; She refuses to be comforted for her children, Because they are no more." And what a sad harbinger that was of yet another atrocity that would later occur in that very same place, there at Bethlehem, because it was in Bethlehem where the enraged Herod slaughtered all of the male children, you will recall, in Matthew 2. Then according to verse 17, "Then what had been spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled saying, 'A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.'"

Well, when we move forward in history and we look at Bethlehem, we discover even more reasons why it has so much symbolism and royal greatness. About 900 years after the days of Rachel, a Moabitess, a lady from Moab, journeyed to Bethlehem and her name was Ruth. There she became a servant and a wealthy man by the name of Boaz found her and took her unto himself as his wife. And as we look at Scripture, we know that Boaz was a type of Christ, the one who became Ruth's kinsmen redeemer and Ruth was included in the physical lineage of the coming Messiah. We read about that in Matthew 1:5 because Boaz and Ruth had a son named Obed who became the father of Jesse who lived in Bethlehem, and Jesse had a son and his name was David.

So, dear friends, it should be no surprise that the son of David, the Messiah King, would be born in the same royal place as Micah prophesied, and it should be no surprise that in the providence of God, Caesar Augustus would demand a census to be taken, one that would take everyone to register to the city of their birth; and it should be no surprise therefore that Mary and Joseph would embark upon a 70 mile journey from Nazareth through the treacherous terrain of that land, especially in her advanced state of pregnancy, to make their way to Bethlehem, the place of their tribal home. But I would be totally surprised if Mary and Joseph, and maybe I'll get to ask them this someday, I would be totally surprised if they did not quote Micah's prophecy as they made their way to Bethlehem, maybe with the cadence of the hooves of the little donkey that bore the virgin and her child. And certainly this would have been one of the things that Mary pondered in her heart when the shepherds came and gave her the announcement, "Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior who is Christ, the Lord!" Yes, here he is.

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What an amazing, amazing story. I've got a lot of things I want to ask those shepherds too.

Well, as a footnote, in Luke 2:1-7, the inspired author is very careful to precisely reveal the sequence of events that led Joseph and Mary from Nazareth of Galilee to Bethlehem of Judea and we have to ask the question, "Why wouldn't they just take the census there in Nazareth? Why travel to Bethlehem?" And let me give you a few thoughts on this before we continue. I believe, first of all, what God wanted to do is to demonstrate the sovereignty that was in charge of all these things. I believe that God wanted them to go from Nazareth to Bethlehem to demonstrate the sovereignty of Almighty God who alone can orchestrate the events of history through the miracle of divine providence to accomplish his purposes. And certainly we see that here. I mean, think about it. Why would Caesar Augustus decide to have a census at this particular time? I mean, just the timing is astounding when you think about it. And why would he choose to tax Judea and make it a province instead of making it a separate kingdom? Dear friends, make no mistake, as we look at this we see the miracle of divine providence at work to accomplish his purposes. You know, kings may think that they devise their own plans but ultimately it is the Lord that is directing their heart. I marvel at the inscrutable mystery of eternal absolute predestination. Man does as he pleases and yet what he pleases is precisely what God has ordained for him to do to ultimately accomplish his purposes. I cannot even begin to understand that anymore than I can understand any of the attributes of God or any of the great doctrines of Scripture.

So why not just register in Nazareth? Well, to demonstrate the sovereignty of God but, secondly, I believe, to confirm the inspired truth of Scripture. Alva J. McClain put it this way, quote, "Upon the fulfillment of the jots and tittles rests the veracity of God." In other words, the most minute marks in the Hebrew language, upon the fulfillment of the jots and tittles rests the veracity of God. As we look at this, there is no other explanation but to say that a sovereign God not only ordained this to happen but he accomplished it and he prophesied it to prove the veracity of his word. You know, there is no other religious book that claims divine revelation that has prophecy in it and there is a good reason for that, because their prophecies would be proven false and it would undermine the veracity of their particular book. But not so the word of God.

So I believe that they didn't register in Nazareth because God was wanting to prove something else and that is the inspired truth of Scripture and then, thirdly, just to underscore the supreme importance and I hope you catch this, to underscore the supreme importance of interpreting all Scripture, including the rest of Micah's prophecy concerning the messianic kingdom, interpreting all of it literally. Not spiritualizing it and

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making it say all kinds of things that you might want it to say, but interpret Scripture literally.

Now, as we consider the picture that is painted by the village of Bethlehem, notice also the prophet speaks of her as being too little to be among the clans of Judah. I mean, literally what he's saying is, "This place is not even large enough to be one province. I mean, it's a place of little significance. It's just this insignificant little village." And it reminds me of little David that lived among the giants and slayed the giant. I mean, you just see these pictures emerging. And yet notice it's, "From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel." You know, isn't this just like our glorious God? Isn't this just like Christ's love and the character of his subjects? And did not the King say we must enter his kingdom like little, what? Like little children. No agenda. No haughty spirit. Just simple, helpless, dependent, faith believing. Don't you love witnessing to our children? They just believe. Did not Jesus say, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is," what? "The kingdom of heaven." And in 1 Corinthians 1 Paul says, "for consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh," every time I read this, I have to raise my hand, "not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise and the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong that no man should boast before God." I am so thankful that Christ came unto those who are too little for the world to even recognize, people like you and me and our precious children; people like us that the world doesn't know and frankly doesn't want to know, don't care to know. And yet isn't it amazing to know that our names have been written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world. We were betrothed to the bridegroom to be his bridal church before time began. Our names are written on the very heart of God, the one who has created us and saved us by his grace. So as I look at this, I'm just reminded that Christ Jesus is the Savior of the little ones.

Let's look, secondly, at the sending of the King. Notice the text says, "One will go forth for Me." This is an amazing truth, that the Father would send forth his Son. Remember in John 5:36, Jesus said, "the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish--the very works that I do--testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me." John 7:28, "Jesus cried out in the temple, teaching and saying," verse 29, "I have not come of Myself, but He who sent Me is true, whom you do not know. I know Him, because I am from Him, and He sent Me." Now, bear in mind although this is true, though the Father sent the Son, the Son voluntarily did the will of the Father. He voluntarily set aside all of his glory that he might purchase our redemption and all of which was empowered and accomplished in his life and work was done by the work of the Spirit. So whenever I think of this, I think, "Oh my, the depths of the Father's love that he would send his only begotten Son to be my Savior. And oh, the depths of the Son's love that he would suffer and he would die in

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my stead. And oh, the depths of the Spirit's love to cause the virgin to conceive the Incarnate Son, that the Word might become flesh and dwell amongst us and we might behold his glory; that the Spirit would then empower the Son of Man and sustain him in Gethsemane and sustain him on the cross of Calvary and then inspire the written word that we might know saving truth and then to come along and to convict the world, including us, of sin and righteousness and judgment; the Spirit that would cause us to be born again; that would indwell us and seal us until the day of redemption."

You know, as a footnote here, the role of each member of the Triune Godhead can be seen in the great work of salvation. I mean, think about it: the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are one in essence but they are three distinct persons equally deserving our honor and praise, but often we tend to ascribe our salvation being to the honor of all of that going primarily to the Son and we forget that the Father and the Spirit were also a part of all of that. But as we can see, each member of the Triune Godhead has played and will continue to play a profound role in our redemption. And God even uses angels in accomplishing his purposes. Isn't it fascinating, the Father sent the Son, and yet when he descended to earth and his Spirit took on human flesh in Mary's womb, he was accompanied by whom? Angels. The heavenly host that announced his birth. And they continue to minister to us. Amazing thoughts.

So we've seen the birthplace and the sending of the King, thirdly, notice the rule of the King. We are told, "From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel." Now, some will be quick to say, "Well, my, what a failure that was. That didn't pan out very good. He came unto his own and his own did not receive him. They crucified their King." Well, while it is true that Jesus came preaching the kingdom to the Jew first, to the lost sheep of Israel, to the chosen people of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenant, it is altogether untrue to say that he is not going to fulfill all that he has promised; that he is not going to establish his rule as promised. You will recall the people asked in Matthew 12:23, "Is this the son of David?" But the Pharisees insisted that his miraculous works were not a testimony of the Holy Spirit but they should be attributed to the power of Satan, and so their self-imposed blindness and blasphemy really sealed their fate, only judgment remained and, indeed, Israel rejected their King, they crucified the Son of Man, but this was precisely according to God's plan. In fact, Peter spoke about this at Pentecost. Remember what he said in Acts 2, "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know--this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." So what escapes the notice of the critic is that the promised King was also first to be the Passover lamb, the final and perfect sacrifice who would come and make atonement for the sins of the people.

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So from the beginning of his earthly ministry, the Savior King preached, "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." And did not Pilate say to him, "So you are a king." And what did Jesus say? "You say correctly that I am a king, for this I have been born, for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth." But also did not John the Baptist say, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world"? As we think about it, is it not the Lamb who will one day be worthy to open up the seals of judgment recorded in Revelation? Is it not the Lamb that will make war against the wicked and overcome? Will it not be the light of the Lamb that will illumine the new Jerusalem?

So the long promised messianic kingdom on earth must await this future fulfillment when the King will return in all of his glory and during the interregnum which is that interval between the King's first appearing and his second appearing where we live right now, the kingdom has taken on a new form, what is called the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, Matthew 13:11, referring to the truths not disclosed in the Old Testament but now disclosed to us in the New Testament pertaining to the Gospel and the church. So, indeed, Christ will be the King of Israel as the prophets have foretold when, according to the Apostle Paul in Romans 11:26, "all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.' From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake," you Gentiles, "but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable."

So the inspired prophet reveals to us the birthplace, the sending and the rule of the King, finally, let's look for a moment at the eternity of the King. We read here that, "His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." You see, this phrase which I find so fascinating, reveals the existence of the Messiah from eternity past that will go all the way through to eternity future; from before time began through the coming millennial kingdom on earth and throughout the eternal state. His goings forth are from long ago.

And you know, Scripture bears out this truth. Let me give you some examples. We see how the pre-Incarnate Christ appeared in the Old Testament on several occasions as the angel of the Lord. Remember in Genesis 16, he appeared to Hagar near a spring in the desert and commanded her to return to Sarah. In Genesis 18, he appeared to Abraham where he promised him and his elderly wife, Sarah, a son and that out of Abraham, quote, "A great and powerful nation would arise and all the nations on earth would be blessed through him." Then you will remember in Genesis 31, he appeared to Jacob in a dream and in chapters 32 and following we read about how, especially in chapter 32, we read about how 97-year-old Jacob, that's how old he was, wrestled with him all night after

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which the Lord blessed him and even changed his name to Israel. Then in Exodus 3, he appeared to Moses in the burning bush. In Joshua 5, he appeared to Joshua near Jericho with a sword drawn in his hand. He appeared to Gideon in Judges 6 and said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior, go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" And in Daniel 3, he appeared in the furnace of fire with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And dear friend, he appeared again as a babe in a manger. And folks, he's going to appear again when he returns in the blazing glory of his holiness and the fiery wrath of his indignation, according to Revelation 19. And from his mouth when he returns will come "a sharp sword, so that with it He may smite the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, 'King of kings, and Lord of lords.'" So, yes, indeed, his goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity.

Oh, child of God, grasp this: the Savior King who has existed as the second member of the Triune Godhead from all eternity has set his love upon us. In 2 Timothy 1, Paul says, "His own purpose and grace was granted us in Christ Jesus for all eternity but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus." Paul says in Titus 1:1-2 that we were chosen of God, that we have the hope of eternal life which God who cannot lie promised long ages ago, which means before time began. Think of this: God chose to set his love upon us before we were ever created, before the foundations of the earth were even laid. Think about it, dear friends: under his sovereign control he orchestrated your conception and mine in your mother's womb. It's an amazing thought, how he superintended your development and your birth. The Psalmist says in Psalm 139, "Thou didst form my inward parts. Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb. Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance." As we look at Scripture, we see that it is God who has actually ordained the length of our life. We read in that same Psalm, "In thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me when as yet there was not one of them." Do you realize that before you were even born, he knew the color of your eyes? He knew the color of your skin? The color of your hair? He knew the sound of your voice. The shape of your face. He even knew that you would rebel against him; that you would violate his law; that you would reject him and ignore him and become his enemy; and that you would be unable to save yourself; that you would be nothing more than one deserving of his wrath. And yet knowing all this, he set into motion a plan of redemption through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-baby in the manger. Well, God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, what did he do? He died for us.

Well, as we leave the study of this text and yet as we continue to savor it in the meditations of our heart, I wanted to close with the poignant words of Charles Spurgeon

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The Mystery of Bethlehem

By David Harrell

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who also commented on this particular text at New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, England, December 23, 1855, and I remember when I read this, it was just so moving to me, I wanted to share it with you. Here's what he said,

Blessed Lord Jesus! thou art ruler in thy people's hearts, and thou ever shalt be; we want no other ruler save thyself, and we will submit to none other. We are free, because we are the servants of Christ; we are at liberty, because he is our ruler, and we know no bondage and no slavery, because Jesus Christ alone is monarch of our hearts. He came "to be ruler in Israel;" and mark you, that mission of his is not quite fulfilled yet, and shall not be till the latter-day glories. In a little while you shall see Christ come again, to be ruler over his people Israel, and ruler over them not only as spiritual Israel, but even as natural Israel, for the Jews shall be restored to their land, and the tribes of Jacob shall yet sing in the halls of their temple; unto God there shall yet again be offered Hebrew songs of praise, and the heart of the unbelieving Jew shall be melted at the feet of the true Messiah. In a short time, he who at his birth was hailed king of the Jews by Easterns, and at his death was written king of the Jews by a Western, shall be called king of the Jews everywhere—yes, king of the Jews and Gentiles also—in that universal monarchy whose dominion shall be co-extensive with the habitable globe, and whose duration shall be coequal with time itself. He came to be a ruler in Israel, and a ruler most decidedly he shall be, when he shall reign among his people with his ancients gloriously.

And by the way, this is precisely what Micah goes on to prophesy in verse 4. There we read, "And He will arise and shepherd His flock In the strength of the LORD, In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God. And they will remain, Because at that time He will be great To the ends of the earth. This One will be our peace."

Dear friends, I hope that Christ is your Savior and King, and if not, one day he is going to be your condemning Judge unless you repent and place your faith in him and I challenge you to do that today. And for those of us who know and love Christ, who have been saved by his grace, as we celebrate his birth and as we anticipate his return when we see him face-to-face, I hope that the truths that we have just studied will once again animate our hearts and take us to even higher heights of worship so that our souls will be able to just ascend into the heavens with our praise. And when this happens, do you know what else will happen? Our love for Christ will grow, our love for each other will grow, our appetite for his word will grow, our desire to serve him will grow, our burden for the lost will grow, and our longing to see him glorified in our lives and for his kingdom to come will

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be the greatest priority of our lives. And so let's take these truths and ponder them even as Mary did and watch what the Spirit of God will do.

Let's pray together.

Father, we are overwhelmed when we contemplate what you have revealed to us in your word and all we can say is thank you. We give you praise and we long to be in your presence. Lord Jesus, we long for your kingdom to come and your will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly for it is in your name that we pray. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You've been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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