

Micah 5:2-5a

December 24, 2011 – CHRISTMAS EVE

## Christmas Invites Us Back

☆ **To little Bethlehem** (vv.2-3)

☆ **To everlasting peace** (vv.2,4-5a)

In the name of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, dearly redeemed:

Mary had a great insight from God the Holy Spirit when she visited her old cousin Elizabeth a few months before the first Christmas. Mary sang a song we call in Latin, the *Magnificat*. She begins with what we all feel on this holy night: *“My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.”* A few verses later she sings, *“He has brought down rulers from their thrones and has lifted up the humble.”* (Luke 1:46f,52) Mary, did you know how lowly you would be before it was all over, the heavy price to be the mother of our Lord?

Dear friends, **Christmas Invites Us Back** to see how God lifts us up when we are lowly and how He brings down the high and mighty in His holy presence too. **Christmas Invites Us Back...**

☆ **To little Bethlehem** (vv.2-3)

For many of us Christmas may seem to be coming at the wrong time and the wrong place. You may be blessed with happy memories of Christmas past – possibly because they were happy. Or maybe your mind has shut out the turmoil and sadness as you long for “the good old days.” But then comes a Christmas when no one else is home, or when your happy home no longer exists. Loneliness at Christmas time can be extreme unless you follow Mary and Joseph **Back – To little Bethlehem.**

What mother would choose such a delivery room? What father would allow such a trip in car, much less on the back of a donkey – if they even had one. But world powers literally left them no choice. They had to travel because of an imperial decree that came from Caesar Augustus in far away Rome. He wasn’t thinking about Mary and Joseph. He just wanted all citizens of Rome to go to their hometown to be taxed. He made a law. The poor couple had to travel as best they could **To little Bethlehem.**

But long before Caesar Augustus declared himself to be a god, the one true God who created the heavens and the earth had decided. A tiny town, insignificant for most of its history, would be the place where the virgin Mary would give birth to God’s own Son. 700 years earlier in the days of good King Hezekiah and the great Gospel prophet Isaiah, a Minor Prophet with a major message, the prophet Micah was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to name one of the last places on earth that any man would ever think of: *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times,”* more literally and accurate to the context, *“...from days of eternity.”* This Ruler would be the eternal God from a tiny town where no one ever went without need.

Imagine Mary’s hopes along the way. A nice room with a bed to have her baby. Did Mary understand by the power of the Holy Spirit what the Jewish scholars told the Magi, where the birthplace would be? **Christmas Invites Us Back – To little Bethlehem.** Only a mother could feel her dismay when there was no room for them in the inn. The stable was all the innkeeper had. But such was the turmoil of childbirth foretold by the prophet Micah in our second verse: *“Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.”* Micah lived during a time of violence against God’s people with no hope in sight.

A few among us have experienced what it’s like to live in a land where enemy troops overrun your town and devastate the soldiers who once protected you. Refugees from war torn countries could easily relate to the Israelites anxiously hoping help would come to save them from the cruel Assyrian armies that shattered the Northern Kingdom of Israel and all the fortified cities of little Judah to the South. King

Hezekiah kept saying that the LORD alone would be their hope. And when all other helpers failed, the Angel of the LORD stepped up to save them. The LORD wiped out the entire army of Assyria in a single night. That's how God deals with powerful rulers who defy Him. He brings the haughty to their knees and wipes out all their power. He lifts up the lowly who find no hope or help in anyone else.

Can you see why **Christmas Invites Us Back – To little Bethlehem** again tonight? It's so normal, so natural to look to family and friends and parties for your joy and comfort at times like these. But sometimes God blesses us by taking all that away. Yes, it is a blessing when we must fall on our knees and pray to God for help because there is no one else who seems to care. Who else could help Mary but the true Father of her holy Child? Stepfather Joseph was a willing servant of the Lord, but he had no power to bring about the birth. God and God alone could bring Mary through her travail to hold the Baby Jesus in her arms. And God alone can bring us through the travail of this life until we see the glorious Jesus in His happy home of light. **Back – To little Bethlehem** we go...

☆ **To everlasting peace (vv.2,4-5a)**

*“He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.”* Mary, did you know how great your Son would finally become?

We are so blessed to live today when we can look back on how God has kept all His promises in the Christ, the Babe of Bethlehem. A thousand years before Christ, the great King David was already looking to Christmas when he wrote: *“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake....Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”* (Psalm 23 AV)

One of Micah's contemporaries, Isaiah the prophet could also see where Christmas was leading: *“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”* (Isaiah 53:6 NIV84) All the prophets knew that the Messiah would come to the crown by way of the cross with all its suffering and shame. Dear friends, on the cross God saved sinners like us. He kept this awesome promise about the Christ of Christmas: *“And he will be their peace.”*

In the best of times we need God's *“peace”* because we never stop sinning against God. In thought, word and deed we show we are enemies of God by nature without hope and without God in the world. God found a way to seek the straying sheep. **Christmas Invites Us Back** to *“the peace of God which surpasses all understanding.”* (Philippians 4:7) This is the peace of sins forgiven and heaven given as a free gift of God's grace. Here is solid comfort when all the world stands against you: *“If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?”* (Romans 8:31f NIV84) God was so determined to save us from our sins that Jesus volunteered to come through Christmas to the cross as our Savior. Think about it. Isn't God ready and able to bless our hearts and souls with **everlasting peace**?

The joy of Jesus that comes with His blessed birth can only increase because *“Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”* (Isaiah 9:7 NIV84) Soon the best of this life will seem like a tiny candle drifting away on an ocean of bliss. And the worst of this life will be forgotten like morning mist that burns off in the bright sunshine. The best of Christmas is yet to be. We can say of the very first Christmas and each one since: **Christmas Invites Us Back – To everlasting peace.**

Mary, did you know? She knows it now. And so shall we for all eternity in Christmas. Amen.