

"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." 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. 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.

Dear Christian friends,

As we gather here this morning, just hours before Christmas, I feel safe in saying that we don't represent the majority of Americans when it comes to Christmas activities. Although most of America will observe tomorrow and the next day as a holiday, most will not be found inside a church building then, much less now. After all, they might be going later in the week, why go this morning!?!

However, don't think that just because America isn't attending church today, or even tomorrow...don't think that they aren't worshipping. There is plenty of worship going on. Only, the object of that worship leaves something to be desired. How many people today, tomorrow, and, quite frankly, throughout the year, will fall on their knees in worship before the gods of materialism, greed, and self? To know that answer wouldn't be surprising, I'm sure, but it would profoundly discouraging.

Yet here you are today. When all around you, society is convinced that the next couple of days is meant for worship of material things, why are you here, and what's more, why are you here with joy in your hearts and praise on your lips? The answer is simple, yet so utterly profound that Paul calls it *the mystery of God...that is now revealed* (Ephesians 3:4-6). For **Our Promised King Has Come**. And as we

welcome him, anticipating his return again, please...

PART I: HE'S A DIVINE RULER

This time of year is marked by company holiday parties – mixers, meet and greet occasions to get to know one another better and strengthen the relationship between company associates. As the prophet Micah proclaimed the Word of the Lord to the Lord's people, he made a bold statement to help them get to know their brother Jesus better and strengthen their relationship with their heavenly father. And in doing so, he told them details about the coming Messiah that must have both fascinated and confused them. He pictured for them a king coming in powerful humility. ***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. 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.***

Just think of the kings that the Israelites had known: kings dripping with arrogance and self-importance, kings luring the people into idolatry and unbelief, kings distracting the faithful from the day when God's true King of Israel would arrive on the scene.

Micah spoke to those faithful, and told them that indeed, the king was on his way. The king, the true king, was coming, and he would be a king like no other. Unequaled in power, even great King David could do nothing but call this coming king "Lord."

And notice, the prophet doesn't this coming king a "king" either. Rather, he said that the one to come would be ***ruler over Israel***. That may not seem like much of a difference, but if you had lived during the reigns of many of Israel's idolatrous kings, you would *readily* see the difference. This king who was to come would not have the shortcomings of the previous kings. No, he would rule perfectly, exercising his total dominion with absolute justice and love: ***King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Let's sing...***

PART II: HE'S HUMAN

Micah also notes another way in which our king is unique from all others: as we mentioned before, he comes as a humble servant, in a humble way, to a humble town, not from mighty Jerusalem, city of kings. This king, with all the power and all the glory of God would hail from quiet little Bethlehem, hiding in Jerusalem's shadow. From *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.*

I think we sometimes lose sight of what actually occurred that night in Bethlehem. Micah says, *Out of you will come for me...* That means the Messiah, on a mission from God, would become human. This is another way of saying what Isaiah did when he called the Messiah by the name *Immanuel, which means God with us.* God was with us as a brother. God himself became human and was born of a woman. And look how he did it. Though holding all the power of heaven and earth in his hand, Christ became a tiny infant born in a barn, laid in a manger in lowly Bethlehem. This promised king has come. He has come in powerful humility. He has come to do what we couldn't.

Let me ask you: When your thoughts turn to Christmas, how often do you think of suffering and pain and betrayal and blood? And yet, that is why this King has come. Paul explains, *God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Ro 5:8).* The arrival of Christ our King as the baby of Bethlehem served as nothing less than the greatest testimony of love that God could give. He willingly gave up his glory, his honor, and his life, all for our sake. The song asks, "What child is this?" The child that came in powerful humility—with all the divine power needed to save us, and all the humanity needed to redeem us. *Let's sing...*

PART III: HE'S A SHEPHERD

Micah goes on to tell us more about this king of ours, *He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.*

This picture of Christ as our shepherd is a pervasive one throughout Scripture. Sheep, as you well know, are not the brightest of animals. Without their shepherd, sheep are completely lost. That is how God describes you and me, as sheep led by his great shepherd. Now admittedly, ascribing to the king the task of shepherding may seem less than regal. Kings do not shepherd sheep, yet here is our king clad in the Lord's royal robes of power, and yet he is our shepherd, watching with eyes of love over every sheep and lamb of his flock, providing for our every need *in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.* This is our Shepherd-King, not sitting on his throne ordering us around. No, using all the strength of the covenant of God and all the majesty of his revelation, he guards our hearts and minds that we *will live securely for then his greatness will reach the ends of the earth.*

PART IV: HE'S A CONQUEROR

Micah concludes, *And he will be their peace.* All of Scripture is summed up in those four words. Christ is our peace.

Isaiah called the Christ-child the *Prince of Peace*, but Micah goes even further, telling us that Christ *is* peace; peace in every sense of the word; peace that can only be won by our conquering King! Peace between us sinners and our perfect heavenly Father? Jeremiah assures, *I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more (31:34).* Peace in spite of Satan's accusations? Paul declares, *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies (Ro 8:33).* Peace in the face of death itself? Our king himself promises, *I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die (John 11:25).* Yes, Christ is our peace, now and forever. *Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace (Lk 2:14).* *Let's sing...*