

Sunday School Lesson for December 7, 2025  
Micah 5:2 and Luke 2:1-7

Welcome to Sunday School on the go from the First Baptist Church in Tallassee. I'm Jim Glass, one of the teachers in the Pairs and Spares Class, and, on this first Sunday of December and the second Sunday of Advent, we're preparing for the celebration of Christmas by focusing our attention on the reason for the season--that moment when God sovereignly intervened in human history to present us with a Gift--the greatest gift ever given and the most important gift we could ever receive.

If you remember the old Calvin and Hobbes cartoon series, you may remember this particular one. Calvin discovers that he can get an official chocolate frosted sugar bombs beanie, complete with a battery-powered propeller and a big star on front. All he has to do is send in four proofs of purchase seals from this very healthy and nutritious cereal. So he hands a bowl to his stuffed tiger, Hobbes, and tells him, "Well, don't just stand there, or this'll take forever."

Finally, after weeks of eating chocolate frosted sugar bombs cereal, Calvin has enough proofs of purchase to send off for his beanie. He tells Hobbes, "I can't wait to get it! It'll be so cool!" But Hobbes, ever careful to notice the fine print, says, "Not for over a month. It says, 'Allow six weeks for delivery.'" "SIX WEEKS?!?" Calvin shrieks. "I'll be OLD then!" Hobbes replies, "And I'm sure your beanie will be the talk of the rest home." After weeks of hoping and dreaming and wishing and running home from school and out to the mailbox, the beanie finally arrives. But there's a problem—it has to be assembled. When Hobbes offers to help put it together, Calvin jerks it away and breaks his brand-new, longed-for beanie propeller. And he's crushed.

But Calvin's dad manages to fix it, and Calvin's ready to go. He puts it on and asks Hobbes, "Well, how's it look?" Hobbes looks at it and tactfully says, "Adjectives fail me." But Calvin flips the switch and says, "I'm turning it on."

Ready? Here goes!” But he doesn’t go. He says, “I’m not flying. This beanie doesn’t make me fly! What’s the use of a propeller beanie if you can’t even fly when you wear it?” “Not style, certainly,” Hobbes says. Now Calvin is totally disappointed and discouraged. He kicks the beanie and says, “What a rip-off! I ate all that cereal, waited weeks and weeks to get the beanie, assembled it myself, and the dumb thing doesn’t even fly.” But then he sees the box that it came in and tells Hobbes, “At least it’s not a total loss. It came in this great cardboard box.” Hobbes says, “Oh boy! Now we’ll have some fun!”

Sometimes, even our greatest expectations don’t deliver their anticipated reward. As the people of Old Testament Israel looked with great anticipation and expectation to the fulfillment of God’s promise of a Deliverer--the One who would redeem the people back from their judgment and restore their place in the world--according to their way of thinking, they had some very great expectations. For example, when Jesus fed the five thousand with only five loaves of bread and two fish, the people expected Him to proclaim Himself as their political deliverer. When He failed to deliver on their expectations, they tried to take Him by force and make Him their king. Their plan was not God’s plan, even from the very beginning.

You would think that a king would be born into a royal household, with great celebration. To some extent, Jesus’ birth was into a royal household, and His birth was accompanied with great celebration, but not what you would have expected, even though the Old Testament prophets had spoken about His birth. As each prophet wrote down the words of the Lord, some of them were given a special insight into the character of the Messiah. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and even David tell us something about who the Savior would be. But the prophet Micah, in the fifth chapter of the book that bears his name, tells us not so much about the character or the person of the Messiah, but the place of His birth, and that’s our first text for today.

Micah, whose name means, “Who is like the Lord?” was one of the prophets who lived in the southern kingdom of Judah during the reigns of such

kings as Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, around the years 735-700 B.C. His name comes in the form of a challenge, and takes us back to the song the Israelites sang after their deliverance from Egypt when the Egyptian army was swallowed up by the Red Sea as the waters closed in over them. In Exodus, chapter fifteen, verse eleven, they sang, “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you--majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them.” Now, Micah comes proclaiming the Word of the Lord, and His very name calls the people back to that formative moment in their national history to remember the deliverance the Lord brought in a moment of crisis, asking “Who is like the Lord?”

The people of Judah now faced another crisis, for these were dark and desperate days for them, as we’ve already seen. The Assyrians were the dominant world power, and their armies had swept across the Middle East, devouring one country after another. During the time that Micah relayed the word of God to the people of Judah, the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed, and the southern kingdom of Judah was under nearly constant siege. As Micah denounced the ungodly rulers, priests, and prophets of the nation, he cried out against dishonest businessmen and false religion, and his prophecy alternated from a message of doom to a message of hope. Yes, judgment was coming upon the people, but God would bring deliverance, and, ultimately, the greatest deliverance would come from a most unlikely place in a most unexpected way.

We get a sense of the impending judgment from chapter three, verses eight through twelve. Speaking to those “who detest justice and make crooked all that is straight,” the Lord says “because of you, Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins.” But nestled away in the gloom of warnings of judgment is this promise found in chapter five, verse two: “But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of

Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.”

At the time of Judah's deepest distress, God gave the people of Judah a peek into what He was about to do. When the king of Judah was suffering humiliation at the hands of the Assyrian army, God promised to send a Deliverer. The people to whom this prophecy was directed were certainly in need of a word of hope. Nothing could have given them more hope than the promise of a Deliverer who would be a second and more powerful David. Their deliverance from the immediate threat was secure, but they would need an even greater Deliverer to free them from the consequences of their own failure to live as God had commanded. Where would this greater Deliverer come from? We read in this verse that He would come from // Bethlehem.

What was Bethlehem in Micah's day? It was a small, insignificant place that wasn't even listed among the cities that Joshua had conquered in his day. It wasn't even important enough to be listed among the cities that Nehemiah counted as part of the rebuilt kingdom after the exile.

How little was the town of Bethlehem? Bethlehem of Micah's day was too small to muster a thousand soldiers for the defense of the nation. Towns and cities of that day were defined by the size of their local militia, but in all Bethlehem there were not even a thousand men of fighting age. It was unthinkable that a village that could not even raise the minimum number of soldiers could be important enough to produce One greater than David.

Bethlehem was located about five miles southwest of Jerusalem in the district of Ephrathah [as you see on the map here](#). The combined name of the town distinguished it from other “Bethlehems” in Judah. The name, “Bethlehem,” literally means, “House of Bread.” “Ephrathah” means “fruitful.” Together, the village name could be read, “Fruitful house of bread.” Perhaps there was a successful baker in town, or maybe the grain fields there

were particularly productive. You could imagine travelers coming into town seeing the sign, “Welcome to Bethlehem, city of good bread.”

That’s all—just another place where a common staple was produced. That was all from a human perspective. But what happened when God determined that little Bethlehem would be the place where the Savior of the world would be born? Now it’s no longer a small, insignificant village known only for its loaves of bread, but it would be universally recognized as the place where the Bread of Life would come to offer Himself to give us life in all its abundance.

What was so important about Bethlehem? Nothing, really; except for one thing--Bethlehem had been the birthplace of David, the greatest king that Israel had ever known. It was David whom God had called, “a man after My own heart.” And in spite of David's great failures in life, God still promised that one of David's descendants would always reign as king of the Jews. In time, One greater than David, and even greater than Abraham would be born, and He would be born in the little village of Bethlehem.

In spite of the insignificance, in human terms, of the town of Bethlehem, it would be in that very place that the Messiah would be born. When the Magi came from the East, following the star that would lead them to the Christ child, they stopped in Jerusalem to ask the king--King Herod--where the child would be born. Herod himself seemed unclear about the answer, so he asked the Jewish council for their learned reply. They recited for him this very verse here in Micah, chapter five, that the Messiah, the Savior of the world, would in fact be born in Bethlehem.

As God worked out His perfect plan in Micah’s day, and as He continues to work out His plan today, we can be sure that He works purposefully to accomplish His plan. The Lord says that this One Who would be born in the little village of Bethlehem would come “for Me.” Even greater than His coming to deliver the people of Judah, even more important than His coming to be the Savior of the world, the Lord says, “For Me” He will come. This

ruler will come for the glory and honor of God, to accomplish His plans and His purposes.

What was this plan and what were God's purposes in sending this Deliverer? The prophet Isaiah tells us that the Messiah would preach good news to the poor, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. He would be the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the source of all creation--the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. We know Him today as the Son of God Who died on the cross that we might find in Him the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting in the presence of our heavenly Father.

Where will this ruler come from? The Lord says His goings-forth, His activities, His might and His power have been from old, even from the days of eternity. God's promised Deliverer would be One Who has existed since before the foundations of the world and the beginning of time. For the people of Micah's day who weren't sure they had a future, this was surely a word of great hope and encouragement in light of their current condition.

How long has this ruler existed before coming to rescue Judah? "From old; from ancient times." The word means, "great antiquity," and as it's applied to a future Ruler, it is certain that Micah expected a supernatural Individual. And we saw last week that the prophet Isaiah also expected a supernatural Messiah, for he calls the Savior, "Mighty God."

In verse three, the Lord declares that this Messiah will come only after the nation of Judah has gone through a period of discipline. God would punish before He delivered, even so, a remnant would remain. In the lives of those in Micah's day, it was a restatement of the promise that came through the prophet Jeremiah, that a remnant of those who would be carried off to Babylon would return to re-establish the kingdom of Judah.

Then, in the verses that follow verse three here in Micah, chapter five, we learn that God's Deliverer will be the Good Shepherd, the one who would care

for His people as a shepherd would care for his flock, and that His dominion will extend over the earth and His rule will be a world-wide rule, but that's beyond the scope of our lesson today, and we must press on.

The future Ruler of Israel, whose goings forth reach back into eternity, would come from the insignificant town of Bethlehem, like His predecessor, king David. This connection to the place where David was born links Him to the promise the Lord gave to David through Nathan, the prophet recorded for us in Second Samuel, chapter seven, verse sixteen that, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever," and reaffirmed by Jeremiah in chapter 33, verse seventeen that "David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel."

This fact was so firmly established in the minds of the Israelites seven hundred years later that, when the Magi came from the east seeking the Messiah, they were directed to the little town of Bethlehem as a fulfillment of this very prophecy. And we'll hear more about that later.

Soon, we'll start singing all those wonderful songs about Bethlehem: "There's a song in the air, there's a star in the sky. There's a mother's deep prayer, and a baby's low cry. And the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing, for the manger of Bethlehem cradles a king." "O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." "O, come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant; o, come ye, o come ye to Bethlehem. Come and behold Him, born the king of angels." "Come to Bethlehem and see, Him whose birth the angels sing. Come, adore on bended knee Christ the Lord, the newborn King." "O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell. O come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Immanuel."

Bethlehem, that small, obscure, tiny little village that Micah pointed to as the place where the King of Kings and the One “whose origin is from of old” would come. Not what you might expect, but the promise was sure.

In this little town of Bethlehem, some seven hundred years after Micah penned these words, God fulfilled His promise. It happened in a way that we all know so well, whether from Christmas reenactments where children dress up as angels and shepherds or from annual reruns of A Charlie Brown Christmas with all the wonder and joy that should naturally accompany this event. Perhaps today we could engage with the characters in this story with the same sense of anticipation and wonder as those who first witnessed or heard about the events Luke describes for us in the opening verses of the second chapter of his gospel in a way that would open our eyes to the long-expected yet surprising unveiling of the goodness and mercy of God.

Here's the story as Luke tells it beginning in the first verse of chapter two: “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to 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, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

In the first four verses of this second chapter, Luke sets the stage for us. Caesar Augustus, the ruler of the extensive and powerful Roman Empire, has decreed that a census be taken. Augustus had come to the throne following the death of his uncle, Julius Caesar. Just a few years ago, Americans completed a census that would have included many of the same things that Caesar's census



did--employment, property valuations, number of children--things like that, in order to establish a tax structure and make other decisions based on information collected about family backgrounds and other things. To complete this census, every family had to return to the village or city to which they could trace its ancestry.

Luke tells us that this was the first census that was taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria. Several commentators point out a difficulty here in that, according to historical documents, Quirinius did not complete a survey until ten years after Jesus' birth. The best answers to this objection seem to be that the survey was begun just before Jesus' birth but not completed until ten years later. A second possibility is that Quirinius actually served twice as governor of Syria, or first as a senior official beneath the governor, then later as governor and so was known afterwards as "governor," and the historical record of his first term is vague at best. Additionally, no writer of Luke's day or soon afterwards questioned his comment here, so it's assumed that he was correct. Regardless, it doesn't affect the rest of the story.

So, God used Augustus Caesar to call for Quirinius to command a census be taken in order to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. Since it was in Bethlehem that the prophet Micah had said the Messiah would be born, God saw fit to use these pagan rulers to accomplish His will to call Mary and Joseph to the place where He had appointed the birth of the Messiah to take place. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the followers of Christ in Rome, recognized God's sovereignty over earthly rulers in chapter thirteen and the first verse when he said "the authorities that exist have been established by God," and in verse four, these rulers are God's servants." No matter what happened in Luke's day or what happens in our day, God is still the sovereign Lord who appoints and dismisses political leaders.

Ever the dutiful subjects, "Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because

he was of the house and family of David, in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.”

Bethlehem, of course, was called the city of David because it was the place of his birth. Bethlehem has great historical significance for the Israelites, for it was there that Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin, the story of Ruth takes place there, and David spent his early years as a shepherd there in Bethlehem.

Mary and Joseph actually did “go up” to Bethlehem since it was in the hill country above Jerusalem and at a higher elevation than Galilee. Today, Bethlehem is a city that has been part of the West Bank and under the control of the Palestinian National Authority since 1995. About 60,000 people live in the city and surrounding area, mostly Muslims and Christians. If you travel there, you can visit the Church of the Nativity, built by Constantine the Great around the year 330 and perhaps the oldest Christian church in the world. It was built over a cave called the “holy crypt” which is said to be the actual place where Jesus was born. The elaborate shrine of marble that’s been built around the place looks nothing like it would have when Jesus was born.

But when Joseph and Mary made their way to Joseph’s ancestral home, it was a small village according to John chapter seven, verse 42. Oddly enough, we never read in Scripture that Jesus ever returned to His birthplace.

While they were there in Jerusalem, “the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.” While we celebrate Jesus’ birth on December 25th, we can’t be sure if we have the right date. The early church didn’t set aside a certain day to celebrate His birth, and we don’t find anything written about the date of his birth until around 200 years later when Clement, the bishop of the Church in Alexandria, wrote that there were those who said He was born on the 24th or 25th of Pharmuthi, the eighth month of the Egyptian calendar, which would have been the 19th or 20th of April. A sermon preached in the year 380 in Cappadocia in modern-day Turkey shows that December 25th was already being celebrated there as the date of His birth, and, soon after, the date

was generally agreed upon by many Christians writers. But, again, we don't know for sure.

“And she brought forth her firstborn son; and she wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” When an Israelite child was born, he was washed in water, rubbed in salt, and then wrapped in bands of cloth or blankets. Luke tells this story in such a way that we're struck by the humble circumstances into which Jesus was born, just as Isaiah had foretold.

Mary laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. The word we have translated “inn” was probably nothing more than a way station with the barest of comforts and no real amenities. Hospitality was generally practiced in those days in Israel, so a traveler had little difficulty finding shelter and food when necessary--as long as there weren't crowds of people coming to register for a census. In some places, large structures called caravanserais were built for public use where travelers could find lodging for themselves and their horses or donkeys.

If you happen to visit Turkey today, you could visit a caravanserai that's been restored or one that would look much like it did in Mary's day. Such a place it was, though already crowded, that Mary and Joseph came to in Bethlehem. Instead of finding a place in the “inn” or the part of the caravanserai where the travelers could sleep, they were obliged to find rest in one of the stalls or underground recesses that were reserved for the animals on which they rode. The manger, of course, was simply a crib or trough where cattle were fed.

John Calvin adds this note: “We see ... what sort of beginning the life of the Son of God had, and in what cradle he was placed. Such was his condition at his birth, because he had taken upon him our flesh for this purpose, that he might, “empty himself” [as we read in Philippians chapter two verse seven] on our account. When he was thrown into a stable, and placed in a manger, and

a lodging refused him among men, it was that heaven might be opened to us, not as a temporary lodging, but as our eternal country and inheritance, and that angels might receive us into their abode.”

/ Ponder for just a moment the simplicity of Luke’s words--brief and matter-of-fact. No mention of how Mary was looked upon by the people of Nazareth, no narrative of the journey she made from the far north at a time when she was preparing to deliver her first child, nothing about passing by or through the bustling city of Jerusalem, or how she might have wondered at how all this was going to play out. The marvel of her cousin, Elizabeth, giving birth to a son when almost all hope had been lost, Zechariah’s experience in the Temple announcing the birth of his son whom the angel said would “turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared,” and realizing that the angel had been speaking about her Son”--all that is seemingly passed over to provide the barest of details: there was a census; everyone had to go to his home of record; Mary and Joseph traveled from Galilee to Bethlehem; and her Baby was born--a story so unpretentious yet so wondrously miraculous.

Angels announced His birth to some shepherds guarding their sheep nearby--but that’s beyond the scope of our study today. Still, if we read on to where the excitement of the shepherds’ visit fades and as they go throughout Bethlehem shouting the news of the Lord’s birth, Luke turns the camera back to Mary and to the manger in verse nineteen. If we look carefully, we can see Mary as she quietly, humbly, prayerfully records each picture, each voice, each word that’s said, as she “treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.”

Luke’s words are so remarkable here. He tells us that she collected all the beautiful, striking, curious memories that were being made in those moments and then continued to ponder them long after the moments had passed. First,

a visit from Gabriel with a message that was almost too good to be true; then a visit to Elizabeth and her blessing of Mary; then a trek to Bethlehem where her Son was born and the birth accompanied by signs and wonders unimaginable. All the while, recalling God's promises: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son, and they shall call His Name, Immanuel." "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." And everything God had promised and announced through the prophets of old was coming to pass, just as the Lord had said.

It had been four hundred and fifty years since the children of Israel had heard the voice of the Lord spoken through a prophet. Now, the Word had become flesh, and was dwelling among His people. That Word came to announce the final defeat of sin and death, to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. He came to do what we could never do for ourselves so that we might have the life that God designed and desired for us from before creation.

And it all began in a manger in a little town called Bethlehem--just as God said it would.

Thank you for preparing your heart and your mind to engage with the wonder of Christmas and the Lord's promises about His greatest gift--the One Who would save us from our sin and grant us eternal life. Next week, we continue with the story of Jesus' birth there in Bethlehem as we join with the angels in celebrating the Lord's advent / and wonder with the shepherds at the Christmas miracle in Luke, chapter two, verses eight through twenty, then, like them, make known the saying that had been told them concerning this Child as Paul speaks of in Romans, chapter ten, verses fourteen and fifteen.

As always, as it's still a good thing to do, keep calm, trust in the Lord, and wash your hands! God bless you!