

**Sermon Manuscript: Micah 5:2-5a**  
**Find God's Perfect Christmas Gift**  
Second Sunday after Christmas – January 3, 2021

*“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. [NIV]*

I just received a notification that one of the gifts that I ordered to give at Christmas will arrive on Wednesday. I suppose that it is not too late since January 6 is Epiphany and the 12<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. Christmas shopping was different this year because of the pandemic and its restrictions. Reports are that many more people made their purchases online rather than going to a physical store. The Christmas shopping experience might have changed but when it came to picking gifts we still wanted to pick out something that was appropriate for the person we were shopping for. When we buy a gift for someone we definitely want it to be something that they want. We at least want to get them something that they can use. The perfect gift would certainly not be something that was completely inappropriate. For example you would not buy a jet ski for your 90-year-old aunt. He wouldn't buy a bicycle for a tiny infant or a power tool like a circular saw for a six-year-old child. What determines a perfect gift for someone is something that is appropriate for them, is something that they want and really need. Every individual person is going to have different likes and different tastes and so buying them a gift will vary from person to person. But there is a gift that is the perfect gift for every single person on the face of this planet. It is the one that God himself is given to us. In our lesson today the prophet Micah tells us how to **FIND GOD'S PERFECT CHRISTMAS GIFT**. He tells us where to look and what to look for.

### **1. Where are you going to look?**

Micah was given a wonderful privilege by God. It was revealed to him where this gift would be found. But it would be in an unlikely place. It was the town of Bethlehem. It was close enough to the great city of Jerusalem – about 6 miles away – that people knew about it. Yet Micah describes it as “small among the clans of Judah.” Bethlehem was so “small town.” Have you ever heard that about some other small towns that you know? Maybe the town where you grew up. Bethlehem had a small in population. It never counted for much in a census. It was small in importance compared to mighty Jerusalem. It was not the place that the Magi went when they came looking for the one who was born King of the Jews. Instead they went to the “royal city” of Jerusalem. The word that Micah uses for small means that last piece that was left over. Like it's second most famous son David, who was the youngest of his brothers, Bethlehem was the last place to look for God's greatest gift.

Yet God had his reasons for sending his Son into the world to be born in Bethlehem. It was the home of the Savior's ancestor of promise, David. It was the place Jesus was to be born in order to fulfill this

prophecy that Micah was privileged to write. God wanted to show his great glory and power as he so often does by using what seems to be weak and frail and insignificant to accomplish his purpose. This is God's way. He rescued the entire human race from eternal destruction not by some mighty miracle or some glorious battle but by the humble death of his own Son Jesus on the cross. As a song from the 80s put it: *"Your most awesome work was done by the frailty of your son."* [El Shaddai, Amy Grant] So when it comes to finding God's perfect Christmas gift, Micah points us to the most unlikely place to look.

Micah's prophecy also tells us that we should look for God's perfect Christmas gift at the most needed of times. God's people at Micah's time were in desperate need of hopeful promises. Micah lived at the same time as the prophet Isaiah. God's people were severely threatened by the Assyrians. The Northern Kingdom of Israel would soon be destroyed. Through Micah the LORD foretells: *"I will make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place for planting vineyards. I will pour her stones into the valley and labor her foundations."* [Micah 1:6] The LORD also warns the people of Judah to repent. If not, he says, *"Zion will be plowed like a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of rubble."* [Micah 3:12] The faithful in Israel were wondering what God had in mind regarding the Savior. Would they be abandoned by the LORD? Through Micah the LORD gives them reason to hope and the promise of rescue at the most desperate of times.

Micah's prophecy points centuries ahead for the people. It says: *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.* [verse 3] Israel was indeed abandoned at the time of Jesus' birth like it never had been before. The Romans completely dominated the land. The Jewish people were politically and religiously humiliated. The legalistic and self-righteous teachings under the Pharisees and Sadducees had led the people to a low point of despair in their hope of finding God's mercy. David's royal line was impoverished and almost forgotten. Joseph and Mary were obscure and unknown descendants of David. But there were still those among the Israelites who were faithful. People like Anna, Simeon, the shepherds of Bethlehem and many others were *"waiting for the consolation of Israel."* [Luke 2:25] Look for God to give his perfect Christmas gift at the most needed of times.

Christ comes to us best and we appreciate him the most when we are at our smallest and our weakest. He comes when we feel like Bethlehem Ephrathah – the last piece of leftover. Sometimes we feel rather small and insignificant in the great scheme of things. We might think that we are hidden in obscurity. We might hope that our sins against God will go unnoticed. But then we also realize that without God's help we would be lost. So then we might think, "Who am I that God should care about my problems?" Like the people of Micah's time, we might be afraid that God has forsaken us. We might wonder what he has in mind. We might think, "God must not care about me or else he would help." It is at just such times as this that we need to look at the people of Israel and see how God helped them. This is why God caused Micah to write this wonderful prophecy. So often in their history their abandonment seemed almost total in their eyes. Yet God brought great salvation to them in an unexpected place and time.

God's help comes when we are at our lowest. He comes to the most unlikely place. He comes into our sin-filled world. He comes into our unworthy hearts. And he comes at the time of our greatest need. God gives us his help and aid in spite of what and who we are. We are most of all sinners who do not deserve anything from God. Micah says: *He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the*

*LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. [Micah 6:8]* Have we always treated each other fairly or has it been easier to put ourselves first? Have we always been quick to show mercy and forgiveness to others as God has been merciful to us? Have we humbled ourselves before God knowing we deserve nothing instead of sitting in judgment of him and complaining about our lot in life?

But it's to this unlikely place and in our most desperate need that Jesus comes to us. We don't need to ask, "Am I good enough to measure up to God so that I can receive Christ?" On our own, the answer to that would be a ringing "NO!" But we find God's perfect gift in Jesus. We can look for him and find him as the perfect help we need for our sin and for all things. In our weakness he shows us and gives us his strength. Paul says:

*Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. ... Therefore as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." [1 Corinthians 1:26-29;31]*

Christ came to rescue the weak, broken and needy like you and me. He came to our lowly world and made himself lowly to save us. Christ is the perfect Christmas gift for us because he was willing to come down to our level of sin and unholiness to make us holy. That's what we needed and that's the truth the Micah proclaims to us. When we look for God's perfect Christmas gift, we find him in our sinful world. Now what do we hope to find in him?

## **2. What Do You Hope to Find?**

Micah says: *Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth. [verse 3]* When we look for God's perfect gift, what we will find is a human child. Micah tells us that he will be born of a woman. Jesus our Savior came to be a brother to the human race. He often called himself "the Son of Man" because he was indeed one of us. He is God the Son. He is the second Person of the Holy Trinity. But humanity was joined with his divinity when the Holy Spirit conceived his human nature in the womb of Mary. Christ was born of a human mother and so is true God who is also completely and truly human. We find Jesus to be true God and true human when we look at him and see the child born in Bethlehem. He is the perfect Christmas gift for the world.

He is a brother to mankind. As true man and our brother, he came to share our burdens and our temptations. The Writer of Hebrews describes him by saying: *We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are and yet was without sin. [Hebrews 4:15]* Jesus was born of a woman and became one of us so that he would know and experience everything we do as members of the human race. He knows our needs, our weaknesses, our hurts and even death. He faced every temptation to sin just as we do. But he never failed as we do. Because he is a true human being, Jesus was able to be our substitute to keep all of God's requirements of us and then to sacrifice his perfect life by his death for us on the cross.

But Micah's words to us don't just show us a Savior who is born from a woman. He also foretells how the one who is to come and be the Savior of God's people will be a divine ruler. He will have divine

characteristics. He will be eternal as Micah tells us: *(His) origins are from old from ancient times.* [verse 2] he will have divine power. Micah says: *He will stand and Shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.* [verse 4] And his majesty and “greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.” [verse 4]

Because our Savior is true God he will accomplish divine works of salvation for us. He will provide a shepherd’s care for us. As a shepherd provides for all of the needs of his flock, so Jesus our Savior provides for all of our needs – both physical and spiritual. By his divine power we will be able to live securely under his care and protection. We are secure with the confidence of knowing that he has provided us with forgiveness of all of our sins before God. We are able to live new lives of peace in this world through Jesus. The message of his salvation will go out to the ends of the world. Micah tells us here at the end that “*he will be (our) peace.*” [verse 5]

Christ is God’s perfect Christmas gift because he is the one that we truly need. He fulfills our need for forgiveness. He is the only one who could do it because he is fully human and fully God. Because he is a true human being he was under the same obligation to keep all of God’s commands just as we are. He suffered the same temptations that we do. But he did not fail where we have. He was able to lead a perfect life for us. Then as a human being, he was also able to serve the sentence that our sins required. He paid the wages of sin which is death. He suffered the agony of the cross and gave up his physical life there. He also suffered the torment of being abandoned by God in hell for us on the cross. To do this required that he would be a human being like we are. That is why he was born of a woman in Bethlehem.

But he would not be the perfect gift from God if he were only just another human being. He is also true God as well as truly human. And because he is God who is infinite, he was able to make his life and death as our substitute count for all of us. Then he comes to us, the most unlikely of sinners, and gives us salvation from sin and death. He sends his Holy Spirit so that we might believe in him as our one and only Savior. In this way he is, as Micah says, “our peace.”

That word “peace” encompasses everything that Jesus is for us. We think of it as a lack of war or fighting. It is the Hebrew word “shalom.” It is a very broad word that means that everything is as it should be. All is right between us and God. It is the state that Adam and Eve must have known in the Garden when God came and walked there in the cool of the day. It is freedom from care and worry, sin and guilt, death and damnation.

Micah first spoke to people who were in desperate times. Micah’s message comes down to us who would face the desperation that results from sin. But we have the promise of Micah fulfilled. He is God’s perfect Christmas gift.

So when we look for God’s perfect gift, let us look in what seems to be the most unlikely place. We won’t find him in the halls of power or wealth or glory even though he has all of these things as his own. Instead, we will find him in the most-humble of circumstances and among those who are humble in heart and in faith look for God’s undeserved love. When we look for God’s perfect gift what we will find is a baby born of a human mother conceived in God’s eternal plan for our salvation. We will find a miracle of Jesus who is truly human and truly God. We will find Jesus who is our perfect Savior. We will find Jesus who is our peace. Amen.