

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Second Sunday in Christmas

January 3, 2021

Sermon by Pastor Dan. Pautz

Little but important

—Micah 5:2

Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.” (NKJV)

Little but Important

There are many things which are little but yet are big in importance. For example, think of the wedding ring on a person’s ring finger. It is comparatively small but it is important. It shows that the person is married. As an example, for the man that ring means that he has a wife to whom he has promised to love, honor, and cherish and to be faithful. It means that he is off limits to anyone else and all others are off limits to him. That ring might be little but it is important. The prophet Micah spoke also about something that in comparison to others is little yet it is very important. “Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.” Little Bethlehem would be great and remembered forever because that is where the Savior Jesus was born. In the top ten favorite Christmas carols is a hymn based partly on the words of Micah, “*O Little Town of Bethlehem.*” Let’s today look at some little things then and now which really are not so little.

Why the phrase Bethlehem Ephrathah? Do you know why the word Ephrathah is attached to Bethlehem? It is because there was more than one village called Bethlehem in the Holy Land. It is like a person saying, “I am from Watertown.” Do you mean Watertown, New York or Wisconsin or South Dakota? Bethlehem Ephrathah is that village about six miles from Jerusalem, not the one located in Galilee.

Although Bethlehem might have been a little village, it had an interesting history. About eighteen centuries before the birth of Jesus was the birth of Benjamin in Bethlehem. His brother was Joseph, his mother was Rachel who died in giving birth to Benjamin and she was buried in Bethlehem. Naomi who became the mother-in-law of Ruth was from Bethlehem. And who could overlook David from Bethlehem, about the year 1000 BC, who became king but as a boy was a shepherd perhaps in the same fields that the shepherds were on Christmas Eve. Bethlehem became known as the city of David. The cemetery in Bethlehem contained more famous people than were living for that is where many kings were buried. Outside of that, Bethlehem was a little sleepy village located in sheep country.

The Holy Spirit through Micah around the year 700 BC told of someone more remarkable than any other who would come from little Bethlehem, “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.” Indeed, this was a prophecy of the coming Christ – and the people knew it. When the wisemen, coming to Jerusalem asked “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?” the religious leaders said, “Well, according to the Scriptures He is born in Bethlehem.”

Notice that Micah said that this child is to be Ruler in Israel. And indeed He is a King, the greatest king of all. Handel’s Hallelujah Chorus sung often at Easter refers to Jesus as “King of Kings and Lord of Lords.” Micah says that the one born in little Bethlehem is from of old, from everlasting. Everlasting means not only that He always will be there but that He always was there. Our minds cannot comprehend that He was always there because we think that everything must have a beginning. But this child does not have a beginning because He is true God, the Lord Himself. The Christmas carol speaks about this child being everlasting.

*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*

Some of our Christmas carols use the word little to describe Jesus.

*“Away in a manger, no crib for His bed,
The LITTLE Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head.*

*The stars in the bright sky looked down where He lay,
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay."*

*In a little stable far across the sea
Was a little baby just like you and me."*

Little but great! Sometimes today the word 'little' is used in a very negative way in describing our sins. We might think of our sins as little, and even use the word little to justify some sins. "I told a little lie." "I had a little too much to drink." "I went a little too far with my date." "I watched a little pornography on the internet." "I stole only a few grapefruit – there was plenty on the tree – they will never miss it." It might be little exaggerations. It might be putting a little negative spin on what a person says, a little bullying at school or at work. Little – but not so little! Jesus said, "But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matthew 5:28) The Bible also says, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer." (1 John 3:15) Remember it was just one little bite by Adam and Eve of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden that brought sin and death and thousands of negative things into the world. Little sins but big sins with big consequences!

This little baby in a little manger from the little town of Bethlehem would have the greatest accomplishments for all time for all people of all ages. He would live as absolutely perfect life for you and me. Some 33 years later after his birth He would occupy a place about six miles from Bethlehem in Jerusalem on a hill called Calvary. There He would be crucified for the sins of the world. A Christmas hymn puts it this way, "Nail, spear shall pierce Him through, The cross He'll bear for me, for you, Hail, Hail, the Word made flesh, The Babe, the Son of Mary." Jesus told of His mission, "I came not to be served but to serve and give my life as a ransom for many."

Another Christmas carol says,

*"At Bethlehem, in David's town,
As Micah did of old make known,
It is the Christ, your Lord and King,
Who will to all salvation bring."*

What harm can sin & death then do?

The true God now abides with you.

Let hell and Satan storm and rave,

Christ is your brother – you are safe."

It was in Paradise Valley here in Arizona which, as many of you know, is an upscale community. The homes are large and pricey; they average well over \$1 million. Some had outdoor Christmas decorations but there was one that especially caught my eye. The Christmas decorations were beautiful. In the center of it was a cross, well lit and fit in perfectly. It told what Christmas is about. Jesus came from heaven above to earth below so that someday we can go from earth below to heaven above.

Little! Does not that word little apply to you and to me? There have been billions of people in this world – even today there are over 7 billion. But just who are we, little ole you and little ole me? Well, listen to who you are. The almighty everlasting God has chosen to bless you. He has given you forgiveness; He has brought you to faith. He wants you to live with Him in eternal heaven. He knows you by your name.

You are not simply a bag of dirt that has drifted into this world, bumped along in life, live for a short period of time, and then pass on to oblivion, only a memory in the minds of friends and relatives until they also pass on to oblivion. Listen to some of the titles God has for you: Children, my son, my daughter. You are the sheep of His flock, saints, light of the world, salt of the earth, branches of the vine, His Bride. You are heading for the eternal home of heaven. Little but Great!

He has given you purpose in life in big things and in little things. "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God." (1 Corinthians 10:31) You are His servants. That is something special and a great privilege. A little girl felt so special when Mom invited her to help bake Christmas cookies. A friend who as a child had lived on a farm felt honored when his father was fixing a farm machine and asked him to bring a wrench or a screwdriver. Don't you feel that it is a great privilege and honor that God asks you to serve Him day by day? We are not just little old me's and little old you's but servants of the Most High. Little but Great!

The Lord loves to use little things to carry out His will and to bless us. Think of how He used five small loaves of bread and two little fish to feed thousands of people. Think of how the Lord still takes care of you by sometimes using little things. Think too of what great things God has done for you through water, a little amount of water. Regular water, not some special water or water transported here from the Jordan River or the Sea of Galilee. It was the water applied to you in Baptism. And by the working of the Holy Spirit through Baptism little babies are brought to faith, they are born again. Baptism is called the washing of rebirth.

Another little thing the Lord uses to bless us is a little piece of bread and a little sip of wine. Of course, we are speaking of the Lord's Supper. Through the Lord's Supper we are blessed with forgiveness, with strengthening of faith, and with strength to live life to God's glory despite and problems, pressures, or pain. Something little but something great!

Another little thing is our tongue. Yes, it can do great damage but it can do great good. Praising God, singing those Christmas carols, speaking of the Christchild, comforting people, encouraging! Little but great!

At a funeral service a few weeks ago we sung a hymn that had been chosen by the woman who went to heaven, I am Jesus Little Lamb."

*I am Jesus little lamb, Ever glad at heart I am;
For my Shepherd gently guides me,
Knows my need, and well provides me,
Loves me ev'ry day the same, Even calls me by my name.*

Yes, a little lamb but Great –Great in the arms of Jesus.

Little Bethlehem

Little Child

Little You.

Little but Important!