



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

"The Birth of a Promise"

Scripture Lessons: Micah 5:2-5; Luke 1:26-38

*This sermon was preached by The Rev. Dr. L. Holton Siegling, Jr. on
Saturday, December 24, 2022 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church
in Charleston, South Carolina.*

Micah 5:2-5

The Ruler from Bethlehem

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.

Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labour has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.

And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.

And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;
and he shall be the one of peace.

If the Assyrians come into our land
and tread upon our soil,
we will raise against them seven shepherds
and eight installed as rulers.

Luke 1:26-38

The Birth of Jesus Foretold

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, 'Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you.' But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.' Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be, since I am a virgin?' The angel said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also

conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God.’ Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.

In 1982, author Byron Price wrote a book entitled, *The Secret*; but to those who know it best – to people like our very own Dr. James Rogers – the book is celebrated more as a treasure hunt.

Through poetry and mysterious illustrations, people are guided to a handful of buried ceramic jars that Price strategically stashed in different cities. Apparently, only a few of them have been found, and everyone seems to be looking for the one which leads to a safety deposit box with a jewel inside.

The book has an amazing following...articles have been written about it, television shows have featured the hunt, there are numerous Facebook pages and group forums of various kinds...and if Ron Burgundy of *Anchor Man* fame were to describe it, I’m sure he would say that “It’s kind of a big deal.”

I mentioned James a moment ago because I first learned about *The Secret* through him, and apparently one of the ceramic jars is buried somewhere in Charleston...and it hasn’t yet been found.

I bring up Byron Price’s book, because, that book, along with any other treasure map, exists in such stark contrast with what happened on that first Christmas Eve so many years ago, for on that night, we beheld the greatest treasure the world would ever know...and its location was by no means a secret.

In our reading from Micah chapter 5 we are told, “But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.”

Let those words sink in for a moment and consider also that they were written some 600 years before the birth of Jesus. Think about that, literally centuries before he was born, God was telling us where it all would happen / God was telling us exactly where we would find the treasure of His grace!

Malachi was the last of the OT prophets, and he too looked ahead to the coming of God’s promised Messiah. “See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple...”

Malachi also declared, “Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes...” Of course, we know from what Jesus said that it was John the Baptist who marked the fulfillment of that particular prophecy / that John the Baptist was, in fact, Elijah in our midst.

I guess it is no surprise that, given the sometimes-complicated nature of prophecies, not to mention that several centuries had passed between Malachi’s prophetic utterances and the time of Jesus’ birth...it’s no wonder we needed a little bit of divine help!

In our NT Lesson this evening, God sends the angel Gabriel to Mary and tells her that she will conceive in her womb and bear a son...that he will be great...and that his reign will last forever!

God also used the stars to help us find His Son. It was certain wise men from the east who had observed His star at its rising and they came to Jerusalem asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?”

King Herod turns to his chief priests and the scribes for the answer, and they find it in

those ancient words from the prophet Micah -- and isn't it interesting that while the star gets the wise men to Jerusalem, it is the Word of God that helps get them the rest of the way to Bethlehem!

Another interesting observation is that in the Bible, King Herod is referred to as "king" right up to the point when Jesus is born, but after that...he will simply be referred to as Herod.

"And what is the reason for that?" we may ask. Well, the answer is quite simple. You see, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords was now born! ...There is no longer any other king of consequence; there is now only one who is worthy of having treasures brought before him; only one who is to be worshipped!

And so, it happened that through prophecies and angels and stars...oh, God was helping us in every way imaginable to find His Son! I dare say, upon him finding him, we learn something exceedingly important about God and about His relationship with us.

Think about the circumstances of His birth -- how it was that Jesus wasn't born of a prophetess like Anna; he wasn't born of a priest like Zechariah; he wasn't born of a King like Herod.

No! Jesus was born of a young woman who was engaged, but not yet married -- a young woman who the Bible tells us was perplexed when the angel came to her...and this isn't a criticism. I mean, how could Mary possibly fathom what all of this meant?

Let's not forget, she's a virgin, and yet she is great with child, and if that were not difficult enough, traveling to Bethlehem by animal, she now goes into labor, but there's no place for them to stay / there's no room in the inn, as we are prone to say.

What's more, there is no honor or prestige in a stable! Shepherds and animals were walking about...huh, it was a manger / a feeding trough which served as Jesus' cradle!

What in the world does that tell us about the nature of God's love? Seriously! What does it mean that Jesus was born into vulnerability / born into the harshness and insecurity of the world in which we live?

What does it mean that he would not spend his childhood playing on the marbled floors of some palace, but instead would walk Israel's far more dusty streets...or that throughout his life the Son of Man would have no place to lay his head?

I don't know about you, but I find that to be comforting...because there is no one I know for whom it can be said that life is perfect! Jobs are lost, people get sick or injured...friends and loved ones let us down.

Oh, seeing Jesus born like this -- seeing later how he lives and dies and rises and ascends -- is a wonderful reminder that our Savior is more than able to sympathize with our weaknesses. On the contrary, God in Christ intentionally chose to identify with our weaknesses!

That's the God who was born in Bethlehem! Certainly not a God who is high and out of touch and unrelatable, but one who enters into the brokenness of the human condition...and lives there!

In Jesus we see the one true God who meets us where we are...and offers to each of us...in the dark and the cold of night, and in such moments of doubt and uncertainty, waiting as we might be for the Messiah, thinking we are all but forgotten...HE - IS - BORN!

...And this, dear friends, is His table...and we will come to it shortly, not because we are so strong, but precisely because we are so weak! And at this table we meet the one who is by eternal birthright...EVERYTHING -- our prophet, our priest, our king!

Oh, make no mistake about it, we don't have to go to Bethlehem to behold the one about whom the angels sang / the one who is called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting

Father, the Prince of Peace;" indeed, at this table, and by his grace in countless undeniable ways, Jesus, the very bread of heaven, promises unto those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, that he will be born into their lives today, and they shall be filled!

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.