

Christ the King born at Bethlehem (Quality: Good)

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[0 : 0 0] In dependence upon the law, I ask your prayerful attention to the prophecy of Micah, chapter 5, and especially verse 2, though we may touch upon the following verses as well.

Micah, chapter 2. But thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall come forth unto me, that is, to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.

As you will be aware, the scribes and chief priests, when asked by Herod where Christ should be born, said somewhat similar words, Thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah, for out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.

But we must remember that Matthew was recording what the chief priests and scribes said. That is what they said.

But Micah records things that they did not mention, which I wonder, as the Lord enables to draw attention to.

[1 : 5 5] Now Micah, a book that we do not often read from or comment upon, as we read in the first chapter, he prophesied over quite a long period in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

So it was before the children of Judah were carried away captive. But he prophesied concerning it, as we read in the fourth chapter, Be in pain and labor to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in Trevore.

For now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field. And thou shalt go even to Babylon.

But though he prophetically spoke of them going to Babylon in captivity, he also spoke of the time they would be delivered, seventy years later.

There shalt thou be delivered. There the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies.

[3 : 1 9] And in this first verse of this fifth chapter, he speaks there of those that lay siege against Jerusalem, as Nebuchadnezzar's armies did, not so long after this time.

But also, of course, it would apply to when the Romans laid siege against Jerusalem and slaughtered so many of the Jews.

But though Bethlehem if not, there was another Bethlehem in the land of Zebulun.

In our country, of course, there are often towns and villages with the same name. And this was to distinguish it from the other Bethlehem.

Where we read the name of a place as Beth, it means the house. We often have it in other ways.

[4 : 3 1] Our homes for the aged friends are called Bethesda homes. That meant the house of pity.

But Bethlehem means the house of prayer. And as we have read before in John chapter 6, Christ is the true bread that came down from heaven, of which unless we eat by faith and drink his blood by faith, we have no life within us.

But thou Bethlehem. Our friend Mr. Oldham spoke of Bethlehem last year.

It was there in five aspects as far as I recall. That it was where Rachel, the wife of Jacob, was buried.

It was there where Ruth was brought by Naomi at the time of the barley harvest. It was there, of course, where David was born.

[5 : 55] It was there where David longed. And I have spoken from that verse at this time of the year when David longed and said, Oh, that one would give me drink at the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate.

And then especially, of course, as this birthplace of Jesus Christ.

Though there be little among the thousands of Judah. Judah was, of course, the tribe from which David sprang.

And we have the genealogy of David in Matthew, the first chapter, down to Joseph, his supposed father.

That was through David, Solomon, Rehoboam, and so through all the kings, down to the time of the captivity.

[7 : 08] And then their descendants, who lived for the most part in obscurity, down to Joseph. That was the regal life, the kingly life.

Luke begins with Mary, or rather, under the name of Joseph. But it is the genealogy of Mary.

Back to Nathan, the son of David. In our country, up to about 1850, when a woman married, all her property became her husband's.

The woman had no property that she could own or claim, and all became her husband's. And in the days of our Lord, the wife on marriage became her husband's, in that sense, and all that she had.

So Mary's genealogy back to Nathan, the son of David, is the genealogy, as we would call it, of Mary, though it is under the name of Joseph.

[8 : 26] Judah, as we know, prevailed above all the other tribes. They multiplied far more. And so, after the division of the kingdom in the days of Rehoboam, Judah and Benjamin were almost as numerous as the other ten tribes.

But it was concerning Judah that Jacob, in the last chapter, or the penultimate chapter of Genesis, who prophetically spoke.

Judah is a lion's well. The lion, proverbially, is the king of the beast. Judah is a lion's well.

From the prey, my son, thou art gone up. He stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion, who shall rouse him up.

The scepter, the rod that the king has as a symbol of his authority, is the queen as a scepter when she is crowned queen and at other state occasions.

[9 : 53] The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet until Shiloh come.

And unto him shall the gathering of the people be. In that sense, I remind you that King Saul, the first king, was a Benjamin.

But after David reigned, the remaining kings were from Judah. And then he continues, binding his foal unto the vine and his asses cold unto the choice vine.

He washed his garments in wine and his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes shall be red with wine and his teeth white with milk.

We read of in the book of Revelation of Christ there having his garments dipped in blood.

[11 : 07] And that verse so sweet to me at times in the book of Genesis when we read of how Joseph's coat of many colors is setting forth the rainbow, the covenant of the Lord in all its beauty.

When the brethren, before the brethren, brought that coat to their father Jacob, they dipped it in blood. and when Jacob looked upon that coat, he said, it is my son's coat.

And so the heavenly father looks upon his people, clothed in the righteousness of Christ through the everlasting covenant in his spirit, dipped in his own precious blood.

so he looks upon his elect and says, it is my son's coat. How sweet the hymn writer puts you.

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness, my beauty, oh, my glorious dress, amidst flaming worlds in these away, with joy shall I lift up my hair.

[12 : 31] Among the thousands of Judah, only then a little village and not much more now, as we visited it on two occasions.

It is on a hill, can be seen from a distance. The large square in the center is called the Nativity Square and a church is built over the supposed spot where Christ was born.

Well, that may or may not be the spot, it is marked by a large silver star nearly as big as this table in front of me, in the floor of the cellar.

And that is supposed to mark the spot where Christ was born. Well, whether that is or not, we must leave, but we know he was born at Bethlehem, a little place, a despised place in many respects.

And does not this, of course, set forth how he is born in the hearts of his people, not born in a manger, not born in a palace, but born in a stable, and laid in a manger before his bed.

[14 : 03] that your great concern and mine should be, especially at this season of the year, has he been born in my heart, in my heart, unworthy dwelling, glorious guests.

We read in the chapter of Matthew of Herod's ignorance, he did not know these scriptures, and of course, with deceitfulness, he said to the wise men, go and search diligently for the young child, and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also, when his intention was to put the Lord to death.

And then the wise men, we read, departed from the king, they didn't promise to do as the king said, but they heard the king.

And then the star which they had seen in the east appeared to them again. It would seem at first, first it had, after directing them to the land of Judah, it was not seen, or they would not have gone to Jerusalem first of all.

But then they saw it again, and they followed its leadings, until it came to the place where the young child was. in passing, of course, in Matthew, we only read of Christ as a child.

[15 : 54] We read of the wise men coming to a house, not to a stone. And we read how Herod slew all the children that were in Bethlehem from two years old and under.

Had the wise men came to the stable at the birth of Christ, Herod would hardly have killed all the children from two years old and under, but only those less than perhaps a month or two.

But that we must leave. It is not important for us to know one thing or the other. But when they came to the house, they fell down and worshipped him.

Not Mary as the Roman Catholics would have. They did not worship Mary, but they worshipped the young child. They opened their treasures, presented unto him gifts, gold, which especially was the gift that kings were given.

You read in Kings and Chronicles of the vast quantity of gold that was given to Solomon. Gold for kings and frankincense setting forth the priestly office of Jesus Christ and myrrh that which was used for the embalming of the day.

[17 : 40] As we read of the women preparing spices to embalm the body of the Lord, though it was not necessary because, as we read, he saw no corruption and rose again the third day.

But to return to Micah, though a despised place of Bethlehem, yet out of thee shall he come forth.

And Micah was able to say, unto me, unto me. Can you say that from the heart that Christ, born at Bethlehem, would come forth unto you and unto me to be a ruler in Israel.

And so this verse especially sets forth the kingship of Christ and in those days of course a king had absolute power.

Herod did not need to consult with a parliament to pass a law to put to death the children of two years old and under.

[19 : 19] He could give the command. And if any disobeyed, they could be put to death. He had absolute power. power. And of course this is set forth in the kingship of Christ.

But even in those days of absolute power, there were always some who rebelled. But do you and I submit to the rule of the king of kings, as he is described in Revelation?

the poet said, reign all me as king, accomplish thy will, and powerfully bring me forth from all ill.

A king, the king of the Jews, as I think I commented upon at our Christmas service two weeks ago.

He was born king of the Jews. If the monarchy continues and Prince Charles is king, he will have become king of this land.

[20 : 39] But Christ was born a king. He did not become one, but was born king of the Jews.

And especially, of course, this takes our thoughts to Calvary. To Calvary. And there was he not despised and mocked and ridiculed.

He saved others, let him save himself. but over the cross Pilate had put this tablet within words of Greek and Latin and Hebrew, setting forth Christ being king of people in all nations as well as the Jews.

This is the king of the Jews. And the high priest tried to get Pilate to alter it and to amend it to say, he saith, I am the king of the Jews.

But Pilate, though so weak in letting the Jews have their way, though he himself said, I find no fault in him. but he was not allowed by the Lord to change that inscription.

[22 : 09] He was the king of the Jews. And I remind you how Paul in writing to the Romans speaks there, that they are not all Israel that are Israel.

that is not all those that are of the natural nation of Israel are spiritual Israelites. He goes on to say, he is a Jew which is one in them.

And especially, of course, that sets forth the Jews as a separate nation. And is it not so to this very day?

the Normans invited this country in 1066, but within a hundred years or so, they were absorbed into the population.

The various time Danes and Norsemen have settled here and all been absorbed. But the Jews, wherever they have been throughout the world, have remained a separate and distinct nation.

[23 : 25] And so should you and I be, if we are the chosen people of God, not partakers of the world in their sinful pleasures.

And how many of them are so manifest at this time of the year. I'm thankful that we live in a quiet village where we do not have the violence and drunkenness that so often we read of in Cambridge or other towns even worse.

Thankful that we are spared much on him. But it is not because we are any better or deserve these things. It is because of the Lord's mercy.

But is he a ruler in Israel. And again a ruler in Israel takes our thoughts to the brook Jagab where Jacob's name was changed to Israel.

Jacob meant a deceiver, a supplant. He lied, barefaced lied to his blind father Isaac.

[24 : 51] Isaac said, Art thou my very son Esau? And Jacob said, I am. And how Jacob reaped what he sowed?

As ye sowed, so shall ye surely reap. As he deceived his father, so he was deceived by Laban when he thought he had married Rachel and behold, in the morning it was Leah.

But most especially deceived by his own sons over the supposed death of Joseph. He said, I shall go down.

He refused to be comforted, we read, and said, I shall go down to the grave sorrow. though of course we know he was mistaken.

Joseph was restored to him, and he said, Then on that occasion I had not thought to see thy face, and lo, God hath shown me also thy sea.

[26 : 05] He shall come forth unto me. are you and I waiting for his coming spiritually with the forgiveness of our sins?

The Lord said, On his days on earth many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye say and have not seen.

That is with their natural eyes. But he was able to save Abraham. Abraham saw my day and was glad.

And one thinks the Lord referred especially to Mount Malah where we read that substitutionary sacrifice. Isaac released from his bonds, taken down from the altar, the knife which he had seen and the fire which he had seen, setting forth that eternal punishment for his sins that he saw, but it never singed a hair of his name, taken down from off the altar, and the ram slain, the ram's blood flowing forth, and the fire burning up the ram.

there we have the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, Jesus in the sinner's place. Abraham saw my day and was glad.

[27 : 52] We read in that wonderful chapter of Hebrews 11 concerning the faith of the patriarchs. they all died in faith, not having received the promises that is the coming of Christ in their lifetime, but having seen them afar off and were persuaded of them and embraced them.

They didn't just hold the promises. you can hold something for which you have little affection. You embrace those you love. They embrace the promises and confess that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

He shall come forth unto me speaking peace and pardon for my sins at the appointed time.

that is to be ruler in Israel. Then as we gather here on this last Lord's day of 2005, whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting.

John in the first chapter that I read at the Christmas service spoke there of the eternity of Christ.

[29 : 36] In the 19th century there was some controversy as to the eternal sonship of Christ, but it has always been a mystery to me how anyone could doubt it.

in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The same was in the beginning with God, all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made.

His goings forth, his plans for the salvation of the souls of his people, was planned before the world was made, that Christ should come at the appointed time to be born at Bethlehem, to go forth setting us a right example of how we ought to live, but more important than that, to suffer, die, and rise again.

for the salvation of his being. They have been whose goings forth have been from of on, from everlasting.

And then, just to touch upon the verses that follow, we read, therefore will he give them up until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth.

[31 : 20] From the time of Micah to the birth of Christ was something like 750 years, and from the last of the prophets, Malachi, about 400 years.

Christ, and during that time, the children of Israel, though they were restored from the time of captivity, there was much fighting against them, they were brought low, they went into idolatrous practices, and so on.

And then he gave them up in that sense until Christ was born. Then shall the remnant of his brethren return unto the children of Israel.

In the Lord's days on earth, a comparatively small number believed on him. The scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the rulers, for the most part did not believe, though Nathanael was amongst them and did believe.

And then we read, he shall stand and feed in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord, his God.

[32 : 52] Not only feeding his people as he did at the multitudes, setting forth the feeding of his people spiritually, the multiplying of the few loaves and small fishes.

I was who once thought one of my first texts here, I think it was probably this corresponding date or the previous week in 1970.

there is a lad here with few loaves and small fishes and what are they among so many?

Though that is now more than 35 years ago, we still feel but a lad in our dependence upon the Lord to break the bread, to bless it, to break it and to multiply that all that are living shall eat and be filled.

But now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. The gospel we read has to be preached in all nations before the end of time.

[34 : 10] one feels that that time is rapidly approaching for the gospel has indeed been preached in all nations.

Then we read this man shall be the peace. Did not the angels in Luke sing when they came to the shepherds in the fields of Bethlehem.

I bring you tidings of great joy which shall be to all people. Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior which is Christ the Lord.

And then that sign that they would find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace.

To his people spiritual peace even whilst they are on earth. As we read in Colossians that peace through the blood of the cross on earth peace goodwill toward man.

[35 : 52] Well may we know and experience in our hearts at this season of the year that Christ is born in our hearts and that we have that peace through the blood of the cross.

Amen.