**Micah 5:2; Hebrews 10:7-10**  
Christmas Eve Devotions  
December 24, 2011

*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.*  
(Micah 5:2—NIV)

To say Christmas is big is a big understatement. Christmas is huge! How huge? Not as huge as Thanksgiving when it comes to air and road travelers. Not as many dinner and dancing reservations as New Year's Eve, but overall Christmas is bigger than any other day.

It is a multi-billion dollar bonanza for the retail sector. The next closest day there is Halloween, but it is a distant second. Christmas is overload time for the post office and package carriers like UPS. There isn't another day of the year into which more people put more time and effort than Christmas. Christmas is big decorations and big light displays—the biggest. No doubt about it—Christmas is big. We all tend to think of it that way, and that makes Micah's words good words for us to hear this evening, because they tell us Christmas is actually little.

Just look at Bethlehem. It wasn't much of a place. Both population and otherwise, it was a small community, and it had no illusions of grandeur. Its only claim to fame was that one of her sons, a shepherd boy by the name of David, had gone on to become one of the greatest kings of Israel. But that had happened hundreds of years before Micah, and about a thousand years before Christmas. Bethlehem now lived in the shadow of nearby Jerusalem.

Of all the cities in all of Israel—a quiet little town, not a lot bigger than its name, where no big news story had broken for centuries—that's where God chose to have Christmas take place. Go figure!

Also figure this: the people who were in the first Christmas. There was Mary, of course. In the Magnificat, Mary described herself with words like "servant" and "humble state." (Luke 1:48) In today's sociological terms, she was lower class.

Joseph, her husband, had some royal blood. Luke 2 says "he belonged to the family and line of David" (Luke 2:4), but if you wanted to find Joseph, you didn't look around in or near the palace courts in Jerusalem. You found him in a little town called Nazareth at a carpenter's bench, which means Joseph had some skills, but he was a blue collar worker.

So were the only other human beings who figured into the first Christmas. They weren't big movers and shakers. They weren't even middle-class management. They were shepherds. They were people who provided day care to sheep and babysat them at night!

Of all the people in all of Israel, God chose to have Christmas come through and to people who were little—people who were no-name nobodies. Again we say: Go figure!

Some have. Some have figured God chose to have Christmas play with a cast of lower-class people at a little wide-spot in the road because it would help make clear just how much his Son was humbling himself in coming from heaven to earth. Or you might figure it this way, that it was an indication of how Mary's Son would, for the most part, conduct his ministry—away from the glamour of the big city and out of the glare of the public spotlight, out with ordinary people.

Maybe so. God alone knows, and some day he will let us see exactly what he was thinking. But what do we see when we look at Bethlehem before and on the first Christmas—when we look at the community and the people.
We see Christmas was little. In fact, it was so little that it came into town, played, and hardly anyone noticed or caught it. Take note of that!

Regardless of what you hear and see; regardless of what family tradition may tell you, things don't have to be big and glamorous for it to be Christmas. The house doesn't have to be immaculately decorated and spotlessly clean, the air filled with the smell of great baking and gourmet cooking.

If that were so, God would have told us and commanded it. Yes, if that were so, God would have made the first Christmas that way.

And yet, while the trappings of that first Christmas were small, the meaning of that first Christmas was huge. Micah said that out of that tiny little manger in the tiny little town of Bethlehem, that tiny little baby would become “ruler over Israel.” Within his kingdom people would “live securely.” And his greatness would “reach to the ends of the earth.” In fact, his “origins are from of old, from ancient times.” Add this all up, and what do you get? You get the answer to the question, “What child is this?” This child is the promised Savior of the nations. This child is none other than God himself. And that is anything but small. That is big. That is huge!

How huge? Huge enough to save sinners for Heaven, huge enough to calm fears, to warm and comfort hearts, to revive and fortify hopes, to lift spirits and make them sing here on earth.

How does your schedule look for the next 36 hours? I’m glad that you’ve chosen to make time on it tonight for you and your household to look in Bethlehem, at the boy-child born there the first Christmas. I hope there is also time on your schedule for doing that on Christmas morning.

Sad to say, that isn't anywhere on the Christmas schedules of many people. Even more sad is the fact that looking in Bethlehem isn't on many Christian people's Christmas schedules; or, if it's there, it's there just once, and that is unfortunately little.

Christmas wasn't meant to be little that way. The fact is that there won’t be anything bigger happening over the next 36 hours than the birth of your Savior.

So come to Bethlehem and see. Hear the Christmas angel, the great glad tidings tell. It's a small thing, but it will be great—for you, your soul, and your house!
Hebrews 10:5-7,10—When Christ came into the world, he said, “Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. Then I said, ‘Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll--I have come to do your will, O God.’...And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

And that’s how it all ends--right? Mary and Joseph sitting by the manger, the child of wonder, child of light lying there peacefully. What a nice story.

Not exactly. The birth of a child is just the beginning, just the first chapter--perhaps even just the introduction--of the book of that child’s life. Just as parents have plans for their newborns beyond that first day in the hospital, God also had plans for his Son. After all, the newborn baby still had 33 more years of life to be lived.

Jesus tells us what his purpose was in our reading from Hebrews. He came to do God’s will. A child who had been born to grow up to serve God and to carry out his purposes--In one sense there is nothing particularly extraordinary about such a thing. After all, that was God’s purpose, God’s will for you and me also. God created us to serve him, to obey him, to do his will. But we didn’t, and we haven’t. We have so very often done our own will instead of God’s will.

Sacrificing our bodies and our desires and our wishes for others and in order to accomplish God’s will has often been the furthest thing from our mind. And at times when we do obey God’s will, it’s for the wrong reasons. Just as if your child obeys you quite well this month because they figure that they’ll get better gifts from Santa and/or from you, when our obedience to God comes from a desire to gain something in return, it’s not truly God-pleasing obedience at all.

Even for you and me, people who have been made alive in faith by the Holy Spirit, thankful obedience to God ebbs and flows, and we never fully get it right. We never perfectly accomplish God’s desire for us as his children. We never perfectly do his will.

And until we can stand before God and say that we have done his will, we will have anything but a merry Christmas and a happy new year. Because peace on earth, peace between brother and sister and peace between nations doesn’t mean a whole lot unless there is also goodwill towards men on the part of God. And that will not happen unless we can say that we have done his will.

Jesus came to do God’s will. While it’s probably not true that the “little Lord Jesus, no crying he made”, it is true that the little Lord Jesus, no tantrums he threw. It’s true that the adolescent Lord Jesus, no authority he disrespected. It’s true that the adult Lord Jesus, no spiritual sluggishness he gave into. While you and I have done all these things, Jesus has not. Jesus did God’s will. And because God chose to credit Christ’s doing of God’s will to our account, he has become--as Jeremiah said, “the Lord our Righteousness.”

More than that, as we see that child lying in a manger, we see a cross in the distant future. Because it was also God’s will that Jesus would sacrifice his body as a payment for our sins. We see him submitting to this will perfectly in the Garden of Gethsemane, where he said, “Not my will, but yours be done.” And then he did it, sacrificing his body on the cross to make us holy “once for all.”

But the story which began with new life in a manger doesn’t end with death on a cross. No, the story which began with a miraculous birth ends with an even more miraculous birth, as Jesus rose from the dead in an undeniable proof that he had perfectly done God’s will, that he had completely and perfectly submitted in his actions, and that he had perfectly sacrificed his body on the cross. And God have given us Christ’s righteous and holy life through faith so that we might have the holiness needed to enter heaven’s gates! There is the ultimate gift that this Christmas season celebrates.

And so it is that out of little Bethlehem Ephrathah, from that tiny little manger has come the one who has defeated sin for us, who has removed our fear of death, and who has crushed the devil’s head. So it is that out of that first little Christmas, you and I can have the peace of which Micah prophesied, knowing that he is ruling in heaven, knowing that he is shepherding us, his flock, knowing that he has done God’s will for us. Amen.