

December 19, 2021 at St. Matthew, Port Washington, WI

Your Lowly King is Coming!

He is eternal / He is a shepherd

It happens every year. A few weeks before Christmas, there is some national news story casting doubt on the true story of Christmas and subtly mocking those who believe in the Bible. This year, it came from Yahoo News. Last week, they posted an article called, “Was Jesus really born in Bethlehem?” The article points out that Matthew’s gospel account mentions a star, magi with gifts, and a trip to Egypt. Luke, however, mentions shepherds. The article continues, “The differences between Matthew and Luke are nearly impossible to reconcile . . . John Meier, a scholar on the historical Jesus, explains that Jesus’ “birth at Bethlehem is to be taken not as a historical fact” but as a “theological affirmation put into the form of an apparently historical narrative.” In other words, they think that the idea of Jesus as a descendant of King David led to the development of a fable about Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem.” The article quotes a few other so-called scholars who conclude that the Bible merely offers “an important insight into the Greco-Roman views of ethnic identity, including genealogies.” Oh, good grief!

Any real scholar would recognize that Matthew wrote his gospel account to prove to the Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah. So, he referenced things predicated about Jesus in the Old Testament, such as the star (Numbers 24), the magi (Isaiah 60), and the journey to Egypt (Hosea 11). Luke was a historian who interviewed people. Mothers, does it seem surprising to you that Mary shared details about giving birth in a barn and shepherds coming that night? There is no contradiction. The Bible is not just some book that gives insight into ethnic studies. The Bible reveals to us Jesus as our Savior from sin and only hope for heaven. The Bible also predicted that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem.

Micah 5:2 is most often quoted to show that Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem was predicted. Certainly, that is amazing. That would be like someone from the time of Christopher Columbus predicting that the future president of the United States would be born in Scranton, PA. (That’s where President Biden was born.) That would be impressive. But these words from Micah especially tell us about Jesus’ ministry. He would be a lowly king who is eternal and who is a shepherd.

Jesus would be born from King David’s family tree. That might sound impressive, but remember that the Jewish nation had been destroyed. The monarchy was gone. King David’s family tree had been chopped down. And David’s hometown of Bethlehem was very little among the clans of Judah. At the time of Jesus’s birth, the population was about 400 people and was nothing more than a rest area for those traveling to Jerusalem 6 miles to the north. Mary and Joseph were poor. Jesus grew up in Nazareth, which was also very small and insignificant. After 3 years of ministry, Jesus did not own a house or any property. His only possessions were the clothes on his back. Most certainly, Jesus lived a lowly lifestyle. That is a comfort to us. I don’t think any of us would call ourselves rich or famous. You would probably consider yourself to be somewhat lowly. Quite often, you feel overlooked and insignificant. Maybe, at times, you feel as if no one truly cares about you or understands what you are going through. Jesus comes as a lowly king so he could meet you where you are – lowly, humble – needing love and help.

There are not many kings left in our world. Most countries have some sort of elected president or congress. The few kings that remain do not have much power. Still, they live a pretty good lifestyle. They live in an extravagant palace. They enjoy all the clothes and fancy food they would like. In other words, they are living off the taxes of the people. They are taking from the people. Jesus is a different kind of king. The only thing Jesus wants to take from you is your sin and guilt. Jesus is coming to connect with you so that he can take all of your sins away from you.

Through the pen of Micah, God the Father spoke to the city Bethlehem and said (:2), **“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah** [in the area near Jerusalem], **though you are small among the clans of Judah** [insignificant in the eyes of the world], **out of you** [Bethlehem] **will come for me** [Jesus would come out of Bethlehem for the Father, in order to carry out the Father’s plan of saving the world.], **one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.**” Jesus would be ruler OVER Israel, not IN Israel. Jesus was not going to be a ruler on this earth. He was going to be ruler in our hearts. The Apostle Paul tells us that all believers are “Israel” – God’s people. Jesus’ origins are **“from of old, from ancient times.”** A more precise translation would say that Jesus is, **“from the beginning, from the days of eternity.”** Jesus is eternal, no beginning and no end. Only God is eternal, with no beginning or end. Jesus is true God. This is even more amazing than predicting where Jesus would be born. Not just a part of God, but the fullness of God

would be contained in the body of baby Jesus. Jesus would be completely God while also being completely human.

Since Jesus is “**from the beginning**,” that means he was there when the world was created. He was there when Adam inhaled his first breath {inhale} and when Eve first blinked her eyes. He was there in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were exploring the new world around them. He was also there when they sinfully desired and then plucked the forbidden fruit to eat it. He saw them rebel against him and he cried as they broke his heart. Adam and Eve deserved to be sent to eternal suffering in hell. But, like a body guard jumping in front of the president to stop an assassin’s bullet, Jesus placed himself in front of God’s anger over rebellious sinners. Right away, Jesus went looking for Adam and Eve and promised that he would one day be born of a woman so that he could crush the devil’s head. Jesus became truly human while remaining truly God so he could be the substitute for every human being that would ever live.

Jesus is still eternal. Just like he saw Adam and Eve sin, the Lord sees all of your sins. He sees the poor decisions and mixed up priorities in our lives. He sees the bad things we have done and notices the good things that we do not do. He hears our words spoken in anger, our gossip, our thoughtless prayers. He knows the selfish and smutty thoughts that rush through our minds. But he can not stand the thought of living without you.

Micah explained (:3), “**Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son.**” God’s people would have no hope of life and salvation unless Mary gave birth to him in Bethlehem. Jesus does not come just to be a cute kid we can sing about. He comes to take all your sins to the cross where he paid for them completely. Your sins are completely forgiven. And in exchange for your sins, Jesus gives you his perfection. Through faith, you are a new person. Through faith, you are perfect and pure in God’s sight. Through faith, you can now live a new life showing kindness to others, especially to your family, the way Jesus showed loving kindness to you. In the eyes of the world, you might be lowly, but Jesus comes to lift you up to heaven.

To comfort and encourage us, Micah described what Jesus would do for us. Verse 4, “**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.” Jesus would be our shepherd, our Good Shepherd.

In 1713, Johann Sebastian Bach wrote a famous piece of music called, “Sheep May Safely Graze.” It is often played on Good Shepherd Sunday, a few weeks after Easter, when we focus on Jesus as our Good Shepherd. Bach, however, did not write the music about Jesus. It was written as a birthday present to the Duke of Saxe-Weissenfels, who ruled close to where Bach lived. It’s a very calm and peaceful piece of music. {hum the tune} With his music, Bach was saying that the Duke was like a shepherd who took good care of his flock, his people. They could live in peace because they had such a good ruler taking care of them.

Bach did not write that music about Jesus, but it certainly fits. Usually, we think of kings as people who live off the taxes of others. Way, way back in the day, though, kings were the men who led the people into battle to defeat the enemy. The king was the one who watched over the people and cared for them. The king earned their loyalty because he was willing to give his life for the people.

Most certainly, Jesus is the Good, the Perfect Shepherd. He willingly gave up his life as he died on the cross so that you can live in peace and safety. The devil cannot drag you down into hell with him. No one and nothing – not even death – can separate you from the love of God because Jesus is the one holding you close to his heart to protect you. Jesus gives you peace through the forgiveness of sins. He prepares the banquet of salvation for you which you will enjoy as you live in the house of the Lord forever in heaven. Just like when sheep are so comfortable and so contented that they lie down in green pastures, we can relax and be glad knowing that Jesus is going to provide what we need for each moment and for all of eternity. No wonder Micah summarizes Jesus and his work (:5), “**And he will be our peace.**”

That’s why we get so excited for Christmas and celebrate it with such gusto. Our lowly king is coming to save us. Alleluia! Amen.