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Sermon Notes

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The Eternal Origin of Christmas

Micah 5:2-5

This morning I want to answer a question that has fascinated people for centuries... what is the origin of Christmas?

BUT Here I do not speak of the December 25th observance that is pretty clearly patterned after a pagan holiday in the Roman calendar... a winter festival time for the pagans to eat, drink and be merry and celebrate the “unconquerable sun”, the fact that the sun proved itself to still be alive despite the shortening of the days

Nor do I speak of the origin of certain elements of our cultural celebration: the Christmas tree, Christmas lights, Christmas cards, Christmas gifts, Christmas wrapping paper, Christmas carols, Santa Claus, stockings hung by the chimney with care, poems like ‘Twas the Night Before Christmas, ballets like the Nutcracker Suite, etc. etc. etc.

Instead I want to focus on the Sending of the Son of God into the world in a humble little town called Bethlehem... the mission of Jesus, entering the world

- Today we consider the most awesome mission in history...
- This morning, we meditate upon the most lucrative voyage any mariner ever embarked upon...
- Today we turn our minds to reflect on the most dangerous excursion an explorer ever took...
- At this Christmas, we worship the One who took the most astonishing journey any pilgrim ever ventured upon

Our text states mysteriously that Christ went forth... His “goings forth”, His origins are spoken of here... capturing in a single word the awesome moment when Christ went forth from heaven to earth in humility... He descended from heaven to earth, laying aside the unspeakably brilliant glory that rightfully belonged to Him, a glory He shared with the heavenly Father, He rode forth to enter the world in humility

He stood up from His rightful seat of power at the right hand of Almighty God, laid aside the robes of His glory and WENT FORTH into the world... the portal of His entry was a tiny, insignificant town: Bethlehem Ephrathah, chosen by God before the world began

Christmas and Time:

This morning, then, I want us to travel in our minds to a distant place and an infinitely distant time:

Christmas brings about a sense of nostalgia... of looking back in time

Our own history: What Christmas was like when we were children... a particularly memorable Christmas, a time when you traveled and stayed with relatives out in the country and they had a quaint farmhouse, and a barn with a horse... the smell of hay; or perhaps it was a Christmas when you were in college... finishing up final exams and traveling home to see your family again; or your first Christmas with a baby... anyway Christmas offers a chance at looking back in time

Or perhaps its Christmases in past history: “It’s a Wonderful Life” showing us glimpses of Christmas in 1945 in America; or a Dickens Christmas—Ebenezer Scrooge walking muttering through the streets of 19th century London, with its horse-drawn carriages and gas lanterns; or further back—Colonial Williamsburg gives its visitors a flavor of what Christmas would have been like in the Colonial era in Virginia, with candles in the windows and a much simpler approach to the holiday... perhaps you want to go much further back, to the tenth century in Bohemia, to Good King Wenceslas looking out on a poor man carrying firewood in a snow storm on the Feast of Stephen—the day after Christmas

Christmas has a built-in power to transport us back in time

Nothing does that better than Scripture however... and this morning, we are traveling back in time... certainly we will pause at Bethlehem to see the baby in the manger two thousand years ago

Our text will carry us further back, amazingly—seven hundred years and more BEFORE Jesus entered the world in that stable in Bethlehem

To the days of Micah of Moresheth, who prophesied about 725 B.C. in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, around the same time as Isaiah

God gave Micah a prophecy of the exact location where the Messiah would be born over seven centuries later!! How did He do that? To answer that we have to go even further back... to the “Days of Eternity”... before the world was even formed... when God the Father and God the Son agreed concerning the details of Christ’s entrance into the world

This morning we will study a simple text of prophecy... Micah 5:2-5, and ask five questions about this ancient mission, the greatest in history:

- Who sent Christ?
- Where was He sent?

- Why was He sent?
- When was He sent?
- What are the final effect of His being sent?

I. Who Sent Christ?

Micah 5:2 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."

A. "For Me" He Will Come... Who is the "Me"?

1. It is not clear in this text for WHOM Christ was sent... or better, "Who sent the Christ"
2. However, the single word in the Hebrew "Li" is translated "for me"
3. The speaker is ADDRESSING BETHLEHEM... and He is saying something to that little town
4. He is adorning it with a future glory... giving it a place it could not have known would belong to it
5. Who is speaking? None other than Almighty God, the Creator of the ends of the earth!!
6. The ruler who will come will come to do God's will

B. Jesus Christ was Sent by the Father

1. Micah implies it, other passages openly teach it
2. Over and over in John's Gospel, Jesus refers to this fact: The Father sent me into the world

John 5:23 He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

John 6:57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.

John 8:16 I stand with the Father, who sent me.

John 8:18 I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

John 8:42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.

John 10:36 what about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?

John 12:49 I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.

John 14:24 These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

John 17:25 Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me.

John 20:21 Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.

3. The entrance of Christ into the world was at the bidding of the Father... He saw that the world was choking in its sin, drowning, without hope... so He sent His Son

C. The Greatest Gift in History

Immense amount of money spent every year on Christmas gifts:

AP story: the cost of the 364 items listed in the "Twelve Days of Christmas", from a partridge in a pear tree to five gold rings, etc. is a staggering \$78,100. I wonder how they set the price of "Ten lords a'leapin"???

Total holiday sales last year: 457.4 billion dollars!!!

Jim Trippon, advisor to American Millionaires, annual World's Most Expensive Christmas Gift Idea List:

\$1.7 million for a Bugatti Veyron sports car

\$999,995 for a Runco 103-Inch Plasma Display

\$750,000 for Neil Lane 15 Carat Diamond Earrings

\$399 for a cashmere pet bed!!

People will almost bankrupt themselves at this time of year to be lavishly generous

But no matter how much the entire Western world spends on gifts this year...

1. No other gift in history compares with the one the Father gave
2. It is costly, it is precious, it is lavishly generous

3. Heavenly mathematics in Romans 8

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

The gift of the only begotten Son of God is of infinitely greater worth than “all things”

Like a scale: “Son of God” on one side “All things” on the other...

4. He was given not just unto life but unto death for us... the Father gave Him a body to be sacrificed, and blood in His infant veins that He might shed His blood in our place

II. Where Was He Sent?

Micah 5:2 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.

A. To Bethlehem Ephrathah

1. A small town five miles south of Jerusalem, located on the edge of the Judean desert
2. 2500 feet above sea level
3. Called by a double name, Bethlehem Ephrathah, to distinguish it from another Bethlehem in Galilee

B. Bethlehem Noteworthy for Its History

1. Though small, Bethlehem had a fascinating history already by the time Micah prophesied
2. there Rachel died
 - a. she was in labor, giving birth to the last of Jacob’s twelve sons
 - b. the agony was intense, and she was dying... she gave birth to a son and the midwife said “Don’t be afraid, you have another son”... as she was breathing her last, she named him “Ben-Oni” (“son of my sorrow”)
 - c. Jacob, filled with grief, renamed him “Benjamin”, (“Son of my right hand”)
 - d. Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of BOTH
 - i) He is a son of sorrow, suffering more than anyone when He died on the cross

Isaiah 53:3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

ii) Now he is the son of God's right hand

Hebrews 1:3 After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

3. To Bethlehem Naomi and Ruth returned to live

Ruth 1:22 So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning

- a. It was a famine that caused Naomi and her husband, Elimelech, to leave Judah
- b. It was the tragedy of the deaths of Naomi's husband and two sons that caused her to return
- c. She came back at the time of barley harvest with her loyal daughter-in-law Ruth
- d. Ruth met Boaz, the two of them were married and gave birth to Obed, the father of Jesse

4. there David was born

1 Samuel 17:12 Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah.

- a. David, the greatest king in Israel's history
- b. Came from this tiny, insignificant place
- c. There David tended his father's sheep and learned how to kill the lion and the bear

By the time Micah was prophesying all this history was behind them!

But Micah was not looking BACK, but looking AHEAD!! Bethlehem's greatest glory was yet to come

C. Bethlehem Noteworthy for Its Name

1. Bethlehem = "House of bread"
2. Ephrathah = "fruitfulness"
3. Hopeful names, but sometimes empty

- a. As I mentioned, it was a famine in Bethlehem that forced Elimelech to flee to Moab
 - b. In Micah's time, Bethlehem was still insignificant, and not living up to its names of a fruitful harvest
4. Christ is the perfect fulfillment for this as well
- a. After feeding the 5000 with five loaves and two fish, the next day people returned for another meal
 - b. Jesus told them to focus on spiritual food... the food He alone could give

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty."

John 6:48-51 I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

- c. Jesus is the true "House of Bread" ... an infinite storehouse of spiritual food
- d. He paid for it by giving His body on the cross

D. Bethlehem Noteworthy for Its Lowliness

1. "Least among the clans of Judah"
2. God did not choose mighty Rome, or wise Athens, or rich Alexandria for the entry portal of His Messiah
3. Even within the minor country of Judah, God did not choose Bashan's high hill, or Hebron's royal mount or the rich palaces of Jerusalem for the coming of the Messiah
4. No, he chose small, dusty Bethlehem, next to the desert, five miles from Jerusalem
5. God delights in elevating the lowly

James 4:6 "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸ He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things

that are not-- to nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no one may boast before him.

E. Bethlehem Noteworthy for Its Fulfillment

1. Why was Christ born there? Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth!

a. The prophecy was well-known

Matthew 2:4-6 When [King Herod] had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶ "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel."

John 7:41-42 Still others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee? ⁴² Does not the Scripture say that the Christ will come from David's family and from Bethlehem, the town where David lived?"

b. Joseph would have been presumptuous to have taken pregnant Mary there specifically to qualify as Messiah

c. No... the miracle of prophetic fulfillment is that some external circumstance compelled them to go

2. Caesar Augustus did God's bidding!!

Luke 2:1-7 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to his own town to register. ⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

3. God is sovereign over the events of mighty rulers

Proverbs 21:1 The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

III. Why Was He Sent?

A. To Be a Ruler

Micah 5:2 out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel

1. God yearns to establish a throne over His people
 - a. A throne of righteousness and power
 - b. A throne of purity and compassion
 - c. A throne that will last forever
2. Israel's kings were, for the most part, corrupt, self-serving leaders
3. God established a ruler over Israel who will rule in righteousness

Isaiah 9:6-7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Hebrews 1:8-9 But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."

B. To Be a Shepherd

1. The Kings of Israel were called to be shepherds of the people
2. David was the best fulfillment of this

David was tending his father's sheep when God called him to fight Goliath the Philistine, and it was by a shepherds weapons that he triumphed

1 Samuel 17:40 Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

So when the time came for David to take the throne,

2 Samuel 5:2 And the LORD said to [David], 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'

BUT... not all of the following kings were good shepherds like David:

3. The shepherds of Israel were plundering the flock, fattening themselves and living luxuriously

Ezekiel 34:1-12 *The word of the LORD came to me: ² "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock?' ³ You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. ⁴ You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. ⁵ So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals.... this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. ¹² As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep.*

4. God would fire them and raise up a righteous shepherd who would gently tend for His flock

Micah 5:4 *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.*

Jeremiah 23:5-6 *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. ⁶ In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.*

5. Jesus is the Good Shepherd

John 10:11-15 *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd who owns the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. ¹⁴ "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep.*

C. To Be a Savior

1. The posture of the shepherd of Israel is significant:

Vs. 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.*

One of David's mighty men, Shammah, took his stand in a field of lentils and fought the Philistines totally alone while the rest of the army fled

2. Jesus stands between the flock and the wolves to protect the flock from their enemies

- a. The hired hand runs away
 - b. Jesus stands and fights
3. The real enemy of the flock is SIN... and Jesus laid down His life as our Good Shepherd
 4. God sent His Son to lay down His life for us, to be our Savior

Matthew 1:21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.

IV. When Was He Sent?

NASB Micah 5:2 His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity."

A. From "the days of eternity"

1. Hebrew phrase refers to ancient days
2. Immediate relation is to King David... the ancestor of this coming King
3. Most Jews, when they heard Bethlehem would think of King David
4. The future King will come from the house and lineage of David

B. Before the Foundation of the World

1. However, the Hebrew goes back even further... literally to "days of eternity"
2. The full message came forth in the New Testament
3. Before the foundation of the world, the Father and the Son agreed to save sinners from hell by Jesus' atoning death on the cross
4. Thus is it said that Jesus was SLAIN from the foundation of the world

Revelation 13:8 the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.

5. Thus is it also said that Jesus' sheep were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world

Ephesians 1:4-5 For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love ⁵ he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ

6. Jesus' origins are from the foundation of the world

7. This is the true origin of Christmas: the plan of God made before God said “Let there be light”; before he made the sun, moon, or stars; before Jupiter and Saturn were crafted and set in orbit; before there was an earth with its mighty mountains and flowing rivers
8. This is the true origin of Christ’s coming into the world

C. “In the Fullness of Time”

1. Yet, God is also a God of time, of the physical world, of the here and now
2. Christianity is more a religion of history than any other... if the history is false, Christianity is false
3. So, Christ’s emergence from the Virgin’s womb, his “going forth” into the world had to happen at just the right moment in history
4. The time when the Roman empire was at its peak... when the world was at peace and unified by a pagan empire, when the Jews had already been scattered and dispersed throughout the Roman world, when the historical circumstances were just right...

ESV Galatians 4:4-5 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

V. What Are the Final Effects of His Being Sent?

Micah 5:4-5 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. ⁵ And he will be their peace.

A. The Worldwide Fame of His Name

1. Jesus does everything for the Glory of the Father’s Name
2. In that name He shepherds and protects His sheep
3. BUT His own name will be great to the ends of the earth... for it is the same name
4. Missionary success guaranteed

“his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth”

B. Peace

1. “He will be their peace”

- a. Naturally we are God's enemies
 - i) Naturally we rebel against God's laws
 - ii) Naturally we are under God's wrath
 - iii) Naturally we await condemnation on Judgment Day
- b. BUT NOW that Christ has "gone forth" from Bethlehem, now that He has drunk the cup of God's wrath, we are eternally at peace with God and He with us

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ

C. Protection

1. Because Jesus stands powerfully as our shepherd, no enemy can touch us
2. Because Jesus stands powerfully against Satan, he is powerless to drag us to hell with him
3. Because Jesus stands powerfully against our own temptations, none of them will succeed in killing our faith
4. Because Jesus stands powerfully against the world with its allurements and its persecutions, none of them will succeed in crushing our love for God
5. Jesus is our shepherd, our strength, our warrior, our guardian, our Savior!!!!

D. A Dwelling Place

Micah 5:4 And they will live securely,

1. The Jews were a harassed and helpless people
2. They lay at the mercy of their Gentile enemies, and were powerless to stand against Assyria, or Egypt, or Babylon, or Persian, or Greece or Rome
3. They could not sit peacefully under their own vines or fig trees, for at any moment a marauding horde of an army could sweep down from the north and conquer them
4. BUT because of the work of Christ, a future peace, a future DWELLING PLACE awaits us... the New Heaven and New Earth

Micah 4:3-4 He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor

will they train for war anymore. ⁴ Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.

Revelation 21:3-4 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

VI. Application

A.

B.

C.

D.