

Day Twenty

Scripture:

Micah 5:2 (Matthew 2:6)

Reflection:

The western edge of Missouri is part of what many people refer to as “flyover” America. The label refers to those vast expanses of farms and pastures and small towns of the American Midwest and Great Plains. These places are far removed from the centers of power and culture. These are places where children might learn to drive tractors before cars. In an urban 21st century America, these flyovers farms and towns are not so much absent as merely ignored.

The Roman Empire in the time of Jesus was an urban culture. Its most significant cities had far more people in them than any city in Europe or North America until the 19th century. But, the epic turning point in all human history will not be rooted in the imperial palaces of Rome or even in the Jewish temple on Mt. Zion. History will be forever changed by obscure events in a little hamlet whose only claim to fame was that a thousand years earlier David had grown up there.

The coming of the Messiah will turn many of the world’s assumptions upside-down. The greatest will be the least. The rejected heretic is the rightful king. The lamb is also the lion. And a couple of small towns, Bethlehem and Nazareth, will change the shape of human history.

Even the name might very well point to something remarkable. Bethlehem is literally “House of Bread.” When you learn that, it is hard not to think about Jesus standing before the multitude and announcing, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” (John 6:41) It may be no accident that the Bread of heaven will be born in the House of Bread.

With God, things are not always what they seem. A stable is a bakery. A manger becomes a throne. A helpless infant is none other than the eternal Son of God. And a small town became the most important city in the world. “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight.”

Family

Materials: Find a recording of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” that everyone can sing along with. Write out or print out the lyrics of the song. It is okay if the youngest children just sing the parts of the song they know.

On Christmas Eve back in 1865 (that’s long before even the grandparents of the oldest people we know had been born), a tall American preacher named Phillip Brooks was visiting the town of Bethlehem in what was then called Palestine. Phillip was deeply moved by what he saw. So, when he was back at his church in Philadelphia, he wrote the song we still sing every Christmas.

(Now, either play a recording of O Little Town or, if your family is up to it, just sing it by yourselves.)

The Jesse Tree ornament for today is about Bethlehem. The prophet Micah lives in the time of King Hezekiah. That is more than 700 years before Jesus was born. But, way back then, Micah predicted that Jesus would be born in

Bethlehem. (read Micah 5:2). As we have already talked about earlier in the Jesse Tree ornaments, Bethlehem was the same town where King David had once lived as a little boy. And Jesus will be a King just like David.

The name of the town also means “Bread House.” And Jesus will tell people that He is like the Bread that God sends down from heaven to feed people. This is not like the bread we eat and goes in our bellies. Jesus is what our hearts need. Bringing Jesus into our hearts is like bringing food into our bellies. He fills up our hearts and helps us every day in how we live. So, isn't it just perfect that God planned that Jesus would be born in a town called the “Bread House?”

Prayer:

In your prayer time, there are two streams of thought to bring before the Lord. First, thank God once again for how perfectly He planned for the coming of Jesus. The Messiah, who is often called the “Son of David” was born in the ancient City of David (Bethlehem). The Bread of Life born in the House of Bread. The prophecies are so perfect they help prove that the story of Jesus is something only God could have done.

Second, think about how God used a poor family and a little town to be where the most celebrated life in all human history will be born. Take time to thank God for, even though the rich and powerful might look down on “flyover” America, it is in just such places that God still raises up men and women who will change the course of history.