

“Be the One of Peace”
Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:46-55

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In our worship service today, the focus has been on “Peace.” We lit the Candle of Peace, promising to listen for God’s voice that ‘speaks for peace.’ We confessed that in our conflicted lives, our peace depends on Christ. In our O.T. passage the prophet Micah foretold of a great ruler to come out of Bethlehem, who would **“be the one of peace.”** This goes hand-in-hand with that Scripture perhaps most associated with this holy season of the Messiah’s birth: **“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”** (Luke 2:14, KJV)

“Peace on earth, good will toward men.” (Or, as other translations like the NIV say, **“...and on earth PEACE to those on whom his favor rests.”** ‘Peace on earth?’ ‘Good will’ towards one another? As you pick up the paper to read the front page... as you turn on the TV for our favorite new broadcasts... as your phone ‘pings’ with another news alert... does the word ‘PEACE’ come to mind? From the Middle East... to the border of Mexico... to the streets of Lake Charles... to the halls of Congress... how much ‘good will’ do YOU see? If the angel’s promise of **“peace to those on whom his favor rests”** is true, well... just WHOM is God’s ‘favor’ ‘resting on’? ‘Cause it sure seems like we see a lot of ‘UN-rest’...

In a world... in a nation... in individual human lives... that can be so broken, so divided, so angry and filled with hatred and despair, what can you and I do to work toward that dream of so many beauty pageant contestants: **World Peace?** After all, we are just **one small person... one small community of faith.** As we seek to pattern our lives after Jesus, God’s Son and Mary’s Babe born in Bethlehem, how can you and I **“be the one of peace”** to ‘worlds at war?’

In order to overcome the ‘darkness’ of our world, we must look to the ‘Light of the World,’ Jesus Christ, as the ‘beacon’ of Scripture shines upon Him... and those ‘little lights’ that bear witness to Him (or, perhaps like a ‘star,’ a ‘light’ in the sky, shone down on the Christ Child in a manger, whom we are to ‘reflect’ in our own lives...). Just as we are to believe in the ‘inspired’ Word of God, we must allow that same Spirit to BREATHE in us the **faith**, the **hope**, the **peace** that is demonstrated by those people and places USED by God for His greater glory. That as we consider that ‘little town of Bethlehem’... and a humble teenage girl... we will come

to appreciate the spiritual truth of a secular saying: that indeed, 'GREAT things can come in SMALL, unlikely packages.' Just as that great 'Prince of Peace' came to a warring, doubting world in the 'small package' of a newborn baby boy...

First, let us consider that 'peaceful' town of Bethlehem. Located about 6 miles from Jerusalem, **Bethlehem**, in Hebrew "*Bet Lehem*," means "*House of Bread*." (NOT to be confused with a local shoe store, 'House of Sole.' 'So-U-I,' perhaps... ☺) As we heard earlier, Micah said about this town: "***You, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah, who are one of the little clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.***" (Micah 5:2) As to the actual size of that 'little town of Bethlehem,' while we know from Luke that Jesus and his earthly parents went back to this town for census purposes, the RESULTS from that census are pretty hard to come by. I've read an estimate of about 300 people... as compared to somewhere upwards of 30,000 for the Holy City (but MANY more when festival days held there!)

This "***little clan***," however, was quite significant... it was the birthplace of the great King David, whose 'origin was from old' in 'ruling Israel.' It was here, in this 'House of Bread' that David would be crowned king. Most appropriate, as David would be a great provider of 'bread,' and much more, for his people. Just as the 'king of Kings and Lord of lords' to come...Jesus... known as the "Bread of Life"... would come to provide much more for his people: Life eternal.

As we remember just what a great impact such a small village could have on the world, it should convict us not to sell short the impact of our own little 'village.' As I read that first line of today's passage, I thought about a different 'translation'... the 'CCV' (Contemporary Calcasieu Version): "***But you, O First Presbyterian Church of Lake Charles, who are one of the little clans of Calcasieu, from you shall come forth for me one who is to rule in the U.S., whose origin is from old, from ancient days.***"

Am I saying that from our congregation will come 'one to rule in the US,' as in a future **President**? I don't know, but I'd sure vote for Kory or Amari, wouldn't you? ☺ More importantly, though, we must consider how we are to provide **Christian leaders**, present and future, for our **world**, both near and far. 'TODAY and TOMORROW.' HERE on 2nd Ave., and out THERE on Corbina Road. As this 'little clan' of FPC, we must NOT sell short our ability to serve

as shepherds... to ***“feed the flock in the strength of the Lord.”*** (Micah 5:4) That ‘flock’ may be at Fairview or Oak Park, at Crest at MorganField, at the SEED center, or off Enterprise Blvd.

If our congregation wants to receive the promise of the prophet Micah’s words... ***“They shall live secure”*** (Micah 5:4)... then we must give earnest thought to how we are going about fulfilling the prophet’s words, ***“He shall be great to the ends of the earth.”*** Which are a lot like those of Jesus in Acts: ***“You shall be my witnesses... to the ends of the earth.”*** (Acts 1:8) WE are God’s witnesses to testify to the greatness of our Savior Jesus Christ... to the ENDS of the earth. I think that Jesus would be happy if we would start by being his ‘witnesses to the ‘end’ of the STREET!’ Or the ‘end’ of the HALL in school or work... or to ‘end’ of the TABLE at home. How are you and I ‘making great’ the name of Jesus...?

Not only did God use a small community like Bethlehem in powerful ways, so too did God use a young teenage girl... one engaged to be married, at that! As bewildered as she must have been at first... apprehensive of her fiancé’s reaction, or ‘what PEOPLE would say’... she yet embraced what a tremendous PRIVILEGE it was to be used by the Creator of the universe in such a historic, monumental way. As onerous as it would have been to be given such a miraculous, supernatural task, Mary could yet experience peace by focusing not on the ‘burden,’ but rather, the ‘blessing!’

As many of you may know, this passage is known as the “Song of Mary,” or, “The Magnificat.” ‘Magnificat’ comes from the Latin for the first word of the first sentence, ***“My soul magnifies the Lord.”*** To ‘magnify’ means to ‘Enlarge,’ ‘Make bigger,’ ‘Easier to see.’ Through the ‘lens’ of her small humble life, Mary makes it ‘easier to see’ the impact God has hand on her: she expresses how **grateful** she is that an Almighty God would look with such favor on a seemingly lowly, simple young girl. Someone who recognized that this **privilege** was not something to be boasted about, but to be **humbled** by. A singular opportunity to be a **servant** of God. She speaks of His **mercy** to those who worship and revere Him, from **one generation to the next.** That the same God who **lifts up** the **downtrodden**, who **fills the hungry** with good, had done **great things** for her, and that **his name is holy, like no other.**

I don’t know about you, but I sure take the many blessings I’ve been given by God FOR GRANTED far too often. Rather than focus on whatever burden I may have, I need to MAGNIFY

what the Lord has done to BLESS me. Make God 'bigger' in my life, so that He is 'easier to see' by others. That just as Mary was given the privilege to carry the baby Jesus within her, so too do you and I 'carry Jesus' with us. And I don't mean a 'baby bump!' 😊 The Jesus through whom we show others **mercy... lifting up** those who are down... **filling** those who hunger and thirst. How do you and I exhibit the **peace** of God to others... by how we focus NOT on our **burdens...** but our **blessings?**

As I began this message about God's **peace**, I pointed out how hard it is to think about our ability to bring that peace to a world so filled with conflict. But we should never forget that we serve an AWESOME God! A God who could bring the miracle of birth of the very Son of God through a humble teenage virgin. In a rough barn made for animals in a small town easy to overlook. And that we can touch lives in the same way that the baby Jesus would do from the cradle to the cross: **one life at a time**. Jesus' birth wasn't covered by Fox or CNN... he didn't hold press conferences... He didn't email, or text, or Twitter. Jesus changed the world one broken, repentant sinner at a time... sinners just like you and me...

As we look ahead to celebrating that life-changing, world-altering birth tomorrow night, and what the life means to us, I'd leave you with the words of song entitled "One Small Child", by a group called "First Call":

"One small child in a land of a thousand; One small dream of a Savior tonight.

One small hand reaching out to the starlight; One small Savior of life."

In this 'great big world,' You may consider yourself to be just 'one small child'... having 'one small dream'... reaching out with 'one small hand.' ... But NEVER FORGET: You carry with you 'one GREAT Savior of life'...