

TEXT: Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:1-2

THEME: DON'T BE FOOLED BY JESUS' HUMBLE BIRTH

1. He Is a Ruler
2. He Is a King

**"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).**

Dear Fellow Christians:

What do car keys, a diamond ring, and stock in Google have in common? They are all "big" gifts that can be wrapped in small packages.

The first Christmas gift was like that. Jesus, the long-promised Messiah, was born in little Bethlehem. It was a humble birth for so great a guest as the Son of God. It was so humble that most of the world missed it at the time. It was so humble that many miss it still today. But DON'T BE FOOLED BY JESUS' HUMBLE BIRTH. Through the eyes of the prophet Micah, we can see the great gift that came wrapped in swaddling clothes in little Bethlehem. To begin with, Mary's baby born in Bethlehem was destined to be RULER over Israel. HE IS A RULER.

Already at the time of Micah, the glory days for Israel's rulers were long gone. Weak kings served as vassals for the larger nations around Israel. Israelites longed for a return of the glory days of David and Solomon. Seven hundred years later, things had only become worse. At the time Jesus was born, Israel had no Jewish ruler. Israel desperately wanted its independence under its own king back again.

Micah's prophecy could give Israel hope. A ruler would be born for Israel. But he would not be born from royal blood in Jerusalem, because he would not rule an earthly kingdom. He would be born of a virgin in lowly, insignificant Bethlehem, destined for an eternal rule of the hearts of the faithful believers. For seven hundred years Israel lived with this prophecy. Even so, many were fooled by Jesus' humble birth. Jesus, the King of Israel, lay in a manger in Bethlehem, and only a few shepherds came to worship him.

We've lived with Jesus' humble birth for more than 2,000 years now. Are we any better than Israel? Many today miss the great birth of the one who came to rule hearts with his grace. They miss it because they are looking for the wrong thing in the wrong places. DON'T BE FOOLED BY JESUS' HUMBLE BIRTH. The child whose birth we recently celebrated will eventually make it from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. There, in Jerusalem, Jesus will be the ruler who defeats our greatest spiritual enemies by his death and resurrection—just as Micah predicted.

Some others who were not fooled by Jesus' humble birth were the Magi. As we heard in our Gospel lesson today: **After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:1-2).**

With little more than a star to guide them, the Magi made the long trip to Bethlehem. Actually, they thought their travels would reach their goal in Jerusalem, not Bethlehem. They went to Jerusalem first and inquired where the king of the Jews might be. Their question disturbed Herod and all Jerusalem with him. Eventually, Herod sent the Magi on their way to Bethlehem. With gifts fit for a king, the Magi bowed in honor before a little boy still living in humble Bethlehem. But HE IS A KING.

So many things stood in the way of the Magi recognizing and worshiping Jesus as a King. They were Gentiles, with little connection to the promises and prophecies of God to Israel. Furthermore, when they arrived in search of the king of the Jews, rather than being excited at the arrival of the Messiah, the people of Jerusalem were disturbed. Finally, Jesus' surroundings in Bethlehem hardly seemed regal. It would have been easy for the Magi to be fooled by Jesus' humble birth. Instead, by the grace of God, we see in their worship, God's announcement that Gentiles too can worship the King.

People today more closely resemble Herod and the people of Jerusalem than they do the gentile Magi. Like them, we have Jesus right in our backyard. He is present with us in God's Word, a copy of which you most likely have in your home. He is present with us in the sacraments that are administered right here at Trinity. We don't have to travel hundreds of miles to find or worship the King.

Unfortunately, many also resemble Herod and Jerusalem when they are disturbed by Jesus. When Jesus turns out to be more than just a mild-mannered baby in a manger, but also the King of the universe to whom they are accountable, it troubles guilty sinners.

Guilt over sin is exactly the reason why Jesus came to be our King. The little-boy King of Bethlehem is the same Jesus who paid the debt of our sin, defeated the power of the devil, and conquered death itself. As he did with the Magi, Jesus accepts our worship and delights to rule over our hearts with mercy and grace.

He isn't only the King of the Jews; he is the King of Gentiles too. That is good news for you and me. Amen.