

### Media and Graphics Notes

<b>Sermon Starter Video?</b>	Yes
<b>Sermon Notes?</b>	There are no notes on screen during the sermon.

## Key Questions

### ***What is this sermon about?***

This sermon is about the place and the promise of Bethlehem.

### ***Why is this sermon important?***

This sermon is important because the promise of peace is needed today, as much as it has ever been needed.

### ***What is the context of this sermon?***

On Wednesday, December 2, 14 people were killed and 21 injured at a shooting in San Bernadino, California. On November 13, 130 people were killed and 368 injured in a series of coordinated terrorist attacks in Paris.

### ***What are the next action steps?***

Get involved in bringing peace to the world:

- advocate for action on a national or international level.
- bring peace in your relationships with family and friends, and
- listen to those with whom we disagree.

See Christ in the other.

### ***What is the good news (bottom line)?***

The good news is that peace will reign. It is not always a clear and direct path, but God is bringing peace into the world.



## Metadata

### Topic(s)

1. Transformation of the World

### Sermon Books of the Bible

1. Acts
2. Micah

2nd Sunday of Advent  
A Season of Hope - Bethlehem  
First United Methodist Church of El Dorado  
Text Online at <http://j.mp/1jkhswt>

December 6, 2015  
Micah 5:2-5a  
Preaching Target Word Count: 2,016  
Audio Online at <http://j.mp/1HWGX2Z>

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## Micah 5:2-5a, CEB

As for you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah, though you are the least significant of Judah's forces, one who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf will come out from you. His origin is from remote times, from ancient days.

Therefore, he will give them up until the time when she who is in labor gives birth. The rest of his kin will return to the people of Israel.

He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. They will dwell secure, because he will surely become great throughout the earth; he will become one of peace.

## Response to Scripture

One: The Word of God for the People of God.

All: Thanks be to God!

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## Introduction

### Sermon Starter Video

Play sermon starter video.

### Series Review

Today we look to the place and promise of Bethlehem.

### Sermon Notes and Scripture Study

I invite you to open your bulletin to a place where you can take notes during the message today. Today, I hope that you will hear:

- Something new or find new questions
- Guidance about how to live as a disciple of Jesus.

I invite you to write down some of the things that you hear in the sermon today and take your bulletin home as a tool to grow in your faith outside of worship. You can reflect on what you heard today, pray for people of our congregation and read scripture to prepare for worship next week.

### Prayer

Will you pray with me? O God, use these words to speak good news so that as individuals and as a congregation we will fear nothing but sin, desire nothing but you and live as part of your kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

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## Opening - Places are Important

### Personal Story: The Cabin

One of the important places in my life is a little cabin in Woodland Park, Colorado. It is not very big. It has a main room which includes a living area, dining

area and kitchen divided by a half wall. There is a short hallway with one room, bathroom and utility closet. There is no central heat or air, no phone, television or internet.

It is lacking amenities that many people would say are essential to a vacation place, yet it is one of my favorite places. My family went there on vacation when I was growing up and I have gone back with Nicole, John and Anne. It's an unlikely place to carry meaning and significance and yet it does.

### ***Transition***

Bethlehem is one of those places in the Bible. It plays an important role in the story of salvation. It is the birthplace of Jesus. I want to remind you of some of the context and history of this place.

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## **The Place**

Bethlehem literally means house of bread, perhaps gaining the name from one of the main industries in the area. It is a city in Judah about 5 miles outside of Jerusalem.

### **Birthplace of David**

Bethlehem enters the story of the Bible in the Old Testament "as the setting for the book of Ruth and as the birthplace of Ruth and Boaz's descendent, David. Samuel anointed David king in Bethlehem, and David made his home there."<sup>1</sup>

### ***David as Prototype King***

You remember that David became the greatest king which Israel had ever known. The scriptures say that he was man after God's own heart.<sup>2</sup>

### ***Messianic Hope***

"Bethlehem, though only a small village, became central to the messianic hope as the birthplace of a ruler of Israel (Mic 5:2)."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome "Bethlehem." In Volume 1, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by Katharine D. Sakenfield, et al. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Acts 13:22

<sup>3</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome "Bethlehem." In Volume 1, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by Katharine D. Sakenfield, et al. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006.

## Birthplace of Jesus

Joseph and Mary were natives of Bethlehem, where they had a "house," according to Matthew (Matt 2:11). Luke concurs that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the "city of David" (Luke 2:4-7).<sup>4</sup>

Bethlehem was an important place, but you would not have guessed it from looking at the town.

*"As for you, Bethlehem of Ephrathah, though you are the least significant of Judah's forces, one who is to be a ruler in Israel on my behalf will come out from you."<sup>5</sup>*

... Though you are the least significant of Judah's forces ...

### Transition

Bethlehem was a small town and unlikely to be chosen for anything.  
Let me give you an example...

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## God's Choice

### A Charlie Brown Christmas

This is the 50th Anniversary of the animated classic, "A Charlie Brown Christmas." Originally produced in 1965, it became a worldwide phenomenon and won both an Emmy and Peabody Award. It aired last Monday night and, if you missed it, you can catch it on Christmas Eve at 9 p.m. after you come to worship here at 7 p.m.

You may remember the scene in which Charlie Brown goes with Linus to the Christmas Tree lot. He had received instructions from Lucy to choose a big aluminum tree, but instead he chooses a tiny live tree with just a few branches. Of course, when he brings it back, the whole gang laughs at him.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, we find later that the smallest tree on the lot – the least likely to be chosen – is the one that brings out the true meaning of Christmas and unites Charlie Brown's friends at the end of the show. This shows us that A Charlie Brown Christmas tells more of the story of our faith than Linus' recitation of the scene of the shepherds hearing of the birth of Jesus.

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<sup>4</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, Jerome "Bethlehem." In Volume 1, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by Katharine D. Sakenfeld, et al. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Micah 5:2, CEB.

<sup>6</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "A Charlie Brown Christmas," Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=A\\_Charlie\\_Brown\\_Christmas&oldid=693908321](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=A_Charlie_Brown_Christmas&oldid=693908321) (accessed December 6, 2015).

## God makes unexpected choices

"The small size of Bethlehem reminds one of a common biblical theme: When God is about to do something great, human estimates of status, size, power, and influence are completely irrelevant. In fact, God often deliberately chooses someone whom we would probably dismiss as the most unlikely candidate for carrying out God's mission. This theme continues in the New Testament stories of the humble origins and the humiliating crucifixion of the one whom Christians claim as Messiah."<sup>7</sup>

### Invitation to Reflection

I wonder, is there a something for you that's like Charlie Brown's little tree?  
Something which may seem insignificant and yet, carries great meaning.

Where are the unexpected places in your life where you find God?  
These are places like Bethlehem – where God comes to meet you.

The place is important.

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## The Promise

The promise is also important.

### Timing of the Promise

Bethlehem becomes the backdrop for the birth of a leader who, Micah says,

*"He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. They will dwell secure, because he will surely become great throughout the earth; he will become one of peace."<sup>8</sup>*

### Particular Time and Place

"This prophecy was a word of hope intended to address the distress of people in a particular time and place. God will finally send some decent rulers to relieve their terrible situation, defeat their enemies, provide security for the future, and rule with some integrity. ...

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<sup>7</sup> Leander E. Keck, ed., *Micah*, vol. VII of *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002, 570.

<sup>8</sup> Micah 2:4-5a, CEB.



### ***Babylon and Jesus***

This prophecy were applicable "not only to hearer's in Micah's day, but also to those facing exile in Babylon, and still later, to the followers of Jesus who search the Scriptures to find passages that help them interpret who Jesus is."<sup>9</sup>

### ***Transition***

These words of Micah, also speak to us today.

I find myself desperately needing the promise that "they will dwell secure" and "he will become one of peace."

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## **Peace**

### **Current Events and Lack of Peace**

Over the past few weeks, the news of shootings from Paris to San Bernadino has been difficult. It is frustrating, saddening and shocking. There are moments when I feel that I just can't process what is happening.

This is a season of hope.

Today, we lit the candle of peace.

We are preparing to celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace.

How can we celebrate in this way when we are faced with this reality?

### **Jesus' Victory over Evil**

Our faith teaches us that the little baby born in Bethlehem was the Son of God. He would grow up, teach, preach, heal and call disciples to a new way of living—

as sons and daughters of God,  
as citizens of God's kingdom and  
as people of peace.

He would be put to death on the cross and three days later be resurrected from the dead. The cross and the resurrection are the decisive moment in history. On the cross, evil was defeated and yet not completely destroyed. There will be a day when evil is destroyed, when Jesus returns. We know how the story will end.

Let me give you a few examples...

### ***D-Day and VE Day***

D-Day was the decisive moment of World War II. The outcome of the war was determined on June 6, 1944. There was no real doubt about the future, yet there was still operations to be completed. It was almost a year later on VE Day, May 8, 1945, when the war in Europe was over.

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<sup>9</sup> Leander E. Keck, ed., *Micah*, vol. VII of *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002, 572.

### **First String and Third String**

Here is a much more trivial example. Imagine your favorite sports team is playing their rival. The game is a blowout. The coach starts putting in the second string players, then the third string players. The opposing fans start to head for the door. There is still time on the clock, but the game has been decided. You know what the outcome will be.

In some ways, we live between D-Day and VE Day. We live between the decisive moment in the game and when victory will be official.

We are on a road that does ultimately lead to peace, but it is a process, and it won't be complete until Jesus returns.

### **U2 in Paris**

One of the most successful rock bands of all time, U2, will close their Innocence and Experience tour in Paris with shows today and tomorrow. They were originally scheduled for November 14 and 15 and were postponed in the wake of the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris. Less than a month later, U2 ... will perform the biggest concert in Paris since the Islamic State-coordinated assault. The tour was scheduled to end in Ireland, and now the Paris shows will become the last dates. "<sup>10</sup>

When asked how this changes the experience, their lead singer, Bono responded:

*"When you get bleak about things and think, Gosh, is there an end to this? Yeah, there is, it just takes lots of work, lots of time. ... Peace is the opposite of dreaming. It's built slowly and surely through brutal compromises and tiny victories that you don't even see. It's a messy business, bringing peace into the world. But it can be done, I'm sure of that."*<sup>11</sup>

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## **Conclusion**

### **Good News**

The good news is that peace will reign. It is not always a clear and direct path, but God is bringing peace into the world.

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10 Joe Coscarelli, "U2, Preaching Defiance, Heads Back to Paris," December 2, 2015, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/06/arts/music/u2-preaching-defiance-heads-back-to-paris.html>

11 Joe Coscarelli, "U2, Preaching Defiance, Heads Back to Paris," December 2, 2015, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/06/arts/music/u2-preaching-defiance-heads-back-to-paris.html>

## Call to Action

Scott Simon is one of America's most admired writers and broadcasters. He currently hosts Weekend Edition Saturday on NPR. Yesterday, he shared an opinion piece in which he describes his response to violence:

*"I don't know how many weeks I've been at my desk in the middle of the day and seen a bulletin cross the screen: URGENT — SHOOTING. It could be most any and every week. The names of towns — Colorado Springs last week, San Bernardino this week, Roseburg, Oregon in October, Platte, South Dakota in September, Lafayette, Louisiana in July, Omaha, in January — and of victims, heroes, and assailants sometimes seem to run together.*

*There is almost not enough time to mourn before the next crime. And within minutes, familiar voices chime in on social media and news channels to say the latest shooting simply proves that they're right — both those who say greater gun control is needed, and those who say gun regulations don't work.*

*I think a lot of people who pray don't think of it as a replacement for deeds, or an occasion to utter a gift list of desires. They pray to open their minds and hearts. They pray when words won't come, and emotions overwhelm. They pray to mark a loss, and to try to make a moment of peace in a landscape of turmoil. They don't see prayer as a substitute for action, but the beginning. The merit of prayer is what people do after we say Amen."<sup>12</sup>*

Get involved in bringing peace to the world:

- advocate for action on a national or international level.
  - bring peace in your relationships with family and friends, and
  - listen to those with whom we disagree.
- See Christ in the other.

## Invitation

Many years ago, the promise of peace came to Bethlehem.  
Today, we receive this promise.  
We pray for peace,  
wait for peace and  
take action toward peace.

## Closing Prayer

[Text here]  
Amen.

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<sup>12</sup> Scott Simon, "After Mass Shootings, People Turn To Prayer — And Prayer Shaming," December 5, 2015, accessed December 5, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/12/05/458505532/after-mass-shootings-people-turn-to-prayer-and-prayer-shaming>