

It would be a sad day if we would ever get to the point where the Bible stories of Scripture which we hear in Sunday school, church, and Bible class and read at home would ever become old hat. It would be a shame if those scriptural accounts would no longer strike us as unusual and special. “Ho-hum! We’ve heard it all before. Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, King David, and the prophets, Peter, James, and John. We’ve heard those stories hundreds of times before.”

It would be even worse if the Christmas story would seem boring. Little children can count on one hand the number of times they have celebrated Christmas. But for many of us this Christmas will fall in line with dozens of others. What a tragedy if our celebration of Christmas became old hat! “We’ve heard it all before. The star and the stable, the angels and shepherds, Mary, the manger, and the Magi. Ho-hum!”

Familiarity breeds contempt.” But we don’t want that to happen in our relationship with God. It won’t when we dig into the Scriptures, leave no stone unturned, and examine the details of his Holy Word because those very words of God have the power to re-ignite in our hearts the smoldering embers of joy and excitement in our spiritual life. The prophet Micah has a message for us that will help rekindle the flame of spiritual zeal in our hearts. He presents a striking message that takes us by the hand and leads us back to Bethlehem as he unfolds The Three Miracles Of Christmas.

To appreciate the first Christmas miracle mentioned by Micah, you have to know a little bit about the geography of Palestine. Picture the land of Israel as a pointed hunk of cheese, wedged in between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. There’s a long ridge of hills running like a spine right down the middle of the cheese wedge. At the southern end of the wedge the hills reach their highest point and on the tallest hill stands the capital city of Jerusalem – the site of the royal palace, the pinnacle for the gleaming, golden temple, the center of Israelite worship, the source of military strength. To Jerusalem pious pilgrims thronged for festival worship. From Jerusalem the fierce fighting forces of Israel marched out for battle.

But by the time Micah stepped on the scene the spiritual condition of the people in Israel had deteriorated. People were only going through the motions of prayer and sacrifice. Their hearts were far from the Lord. Their worship was empty and their armies weak. So through his spokesman Micah, God threatened humiliation for the haughty people of Judah. **“Marshal [huddle] your troops, O city of troops, for a siege is laid against us.”** An enemy army would surround the city and pick on the people. Even the mighty king of Judah would get humiliated. He would have the ruling scepter snatched out of his hand and get clobbered on the head with it. **“They shall strike Israel’s ruler on the cheek with a rod.”**

But our God is truly amazing. He linked a promise of rescue to the threat of ruin. Through Micah God announced that he was going to raise up a new ruler to help his people. Any Israelite citizen with an IQ at least two points higher than a house plant knew where to look for this new king – Jerusalem! That’s when Micah shocked them with a message about an extraordinary miracle. **“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 days of eternity.”** A ruler from Bethlehem? To an Israelite that was more than extraordinary. The very idea was preposterous. “Bethlehem is so small it doesn’t register on most maps. It’s just a tiny unincorporated village five miles south of Jerusalem. A king

coming from there? Ha!” That would be like saying that the next quarterback for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers will be coming from Open Bible Lutheran Church. But the little town of Bethlehem was going to be the scene of God’s Christmas miracle and on that one day become an extraordinary place.

There’s an important lesson here for us, not just at Christmas time but every day of our lives. God often uses seemingly insignificant people and things to work awesome miracles and to accomplish grand plans. Jacob was the younger son of Isaac and a cheater at that. Yet God chose him, not his older brother, to be in the line of the Savior. Joseph was a snotty teenager, a slave, and a prisoner before God made him the leader of Egypt. Judah was the fourth of the twelve sons of Jacob, not the firstborn, and a dirty old man at that. Yet God allowed him and his descendants to carry the promise of the Savior. David was a simple shepherd boy and the youngest of eight sons. Yet God turned him into Israel’s greatest king. Ever wonder why God operates in this way? The answer is clear. The weakness and insignificance of people make what really counts stand out – the greatness of God! I am reminded of the words of the apostle Paul, “The foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 Corinthians 1:25).

The Lord God still operates in this extraordinary way today. He can use an insignificant WELS congregation in The Villages to reach lost souls. He uses parents to teach little ones the true meaning of Christmas. He uses people like you to give friends who are hurting real hope and real joy. So the extraordinary geography of the Christmas story reminds us of the way God works. His Christmas miracle involved a seemingly insignificant but very important place, and the benefits of that miracle happen in other seemingly insignificant place but very important places like in your heart, in your home, and among your friends.

There are a few grandmas and great-grandmas today who are surprised that a woman can enter a hospital, have a baby, and return home within a day or two. But we know that neo-natal and post-natal care have improved. The percentage of safe and successful deliveries continues to rise. Two thousand years ago there were no sterile birthing rooms, no fetal monitors. Mary and Joseph searched Bethlehem in vain for a hospital. There wasn’t even room for them in the inn. Mary delivered her baby in an animal shelter.

If a physician had assisted Mary and recorded the details in a medical journal, he probably would have noted nothing unusual about this birth. Everything appeared to be normal – ten fingers, ten toes, eyes squeezed shut. But Micah reminds us of another Christmas miracle. Mary gave birth to an extraordinary Person. “Israel will be abandoned [with no ruler] until the time when she who is in labor gives birth ... his origins are from of old, from days of eternity.” Micah talked about a child who would be born, a real human child. But he also said that this baby would have origins from days of eternity. There can be only one explanation. This Child is both human and divine, both man and God. This miracle of Christmas shows us the glory of the baby Jesus that he is far more than a mere human. It shows us the love of the Son of God, that he would leave the glory of heaven for us. It shows us the nature of our Savior, that he would add humanity to his deity.

Seven hundred years after Micah died his prophecy came true. Jesus had no human father. He is “*true God, begotten of his Father from eternity and also true man, born of the virgin Mary.*” “In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9), the apostle Paul wrote. In his letter to the Romans he states, “From [the Israelites nation] is traced

the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised” (Romans 9:5)! A high school student can dissect a frog and learn of its parts, but here is a miracle that no biology text can explain. This is the second miracle of Christmas, an extraordinary Person was born. This extraordinary biology had to occur in order for this new ruler to carry out the final miracle predicted by Micah.

The people of Israel were shocked when they heard Micah predict that a new king would be born in little Bethlehem. They were surprised, and maybe even confused, when they heard that this ruler would have origins from days of eternity. But they were absolutely stunned when they heard how this new king would rule his people. The Israelites assumed that all kings were cut from the same cloth, big bullies who toss their authority around and tax the living daylight out of people.

But listen to Micah! “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. And he will be their peace.” This new ruler was not coming to stop all wars between nations and quarrels between people. He was coming to establish peace between God and human beings. Sinners deserve God’s anger and punishment. You and I deserve God’s punishment. But thanks to the Baby born in Bethlehem sinners like we now get God’s love and forgiveness. The extraordinary Person born in Bethlehem fits in with God’s extraordinary plan. Jesus was both God and man – human so that he could live under God’s demand for humans to be absolutely sinless and God to keep that demand perfectly in our place; human so that he could die to pay for sin and God so that his death would have the great value to pay for all sins of all people of all time. God’s extraordinary plan was to count all that this new ruler did as though we did it. By this miracle God’s own Son brought peace on earth, good will from God to people.

So now it is time for us to shake off the doldrums and the ho-hums, to sit up and pay attention, to open our eyes as wide as half dollars, and to marvel at The Three Miracles Of Christmas. The first has to do with geography. It all began in an unexpected and thus extraordinary place called Bethlehem. The second has to do with biology and the fact that God could set aside the laws of nature which he designed to bring the perfect, and thus extraordinary, Savior into the world, born of a virgin. The third has to do with theology and the awesome, and thus extraordinary, news that all of this means we are going to heaven.

Don’t let the Christmas story you have heard hundreds of times become old hat. When you’re weary of fighting the battle against temptation, when you’re exhausted from spinning your wheels at work, when you’re not sure where to turn to heal a broken heart, go again and again to the little town of Bethlehem to see the extraordinary miracles of Christmas which will melt the icicles in your heart and rekindle flames of wonder and joy. Amen.