

There have been some people, who, the minute they were born, everyone knew that they were destined for greatness. In 1500 A.D. a baby boy was born that all expected great things from. His name was Charles, and his father was Duke Philip, the Duke of Burgundy, and Charles' mother was Joanna, the Daughter of the famous king and queen Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain. On top of all this, Charles belonged to the famous Hapsburg family, which was the family that ruled the German states. So when Charles was only a day old, he already was a powerful person, being the future ruler of part of France, much of Germany, some of Italy, and all of Spain. This Charles became Charles V, one of the most powerful rulers ever in Europe. But this didn't surprise anyone, because ever since Charles' royal birth, everyone expected him to become great.

But that's more the exception than the norm. I mean, Abraham Lincoln's parents never looked at little Abe when he was a newborn out on the frontier and think, "this baby is destined for greatness! He's going to be president of the US." They couldn't have thought that. Albert Einstein was so slow as a child that his parents were told by his teachers that he'd never amount to anything. And as I look at my 18 month grandson Edison, I don't know what the future will hold for him. It's fun to look at him and imagine where he will be in 25-30 years from now, what she'll be.

But there was another baby who was destined for greatness the moment he was born. When Jesus was born of Mary, not only did the world know that he was going to be great, but the world also knew many of the details of Jesus' life. That's because God caused these details to be recorded in the Old Testament as people looked ahead to this great baby that was born. So this morning, we will look at this baby Jesus, Destined For Greatness!

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? 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”

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.

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.

Seven hundred years after Micah died his prophecy came true. “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 another miracle of Christmas, an extraordinary Person was born. This extraordinary biology had to occur in order for this new ruler to carry out his mission. What was that mission?

Our lesson says, “He shall 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.

Jesus became a human being so that Israelites and Gentiles alike could call Jesus their brother. I know that siblings don't always get along. But what if you had Jesus as your brother as you grew up? Oh, he'd be the perfect brother! He'd never get jealous of the things that you had. Jesus would never grab his toys away from you and say, "no! Mine!" Jesus would encourage your parents to place you ahead of him. Well, Jesus is your brother. He didn't grow up

in your household like you and your siblings, but he came to the very same earth, had the very same joys, experienced the very same sorrows, all so that he could die for you. You see, God can't die. So God couldn't die on the cross for your sins. But people can die. So a person, the God-Man Jesus died for your sins so that you would be his sister or brother for all eternity.

Jesus was not just our big brother, but also a shepherd to us. Not a literal one, Jesus never raised sheep as far as we know, but he was a shepherd much like his ancestor David who had very humble beginnings as well. While David's brothers were off fighting Philistines and earning for themselves military honors, young David was fighting different battles of his own. To protect helpless sheep, David risked his life, killing ferocious beasts like lions and bears.

And we, the helpless flock of God's church, need Jesus to be a shepherd for us. For it would be a courageous but stupid sheep who said to his shepherd, "no thanks, I think I'll take care of this bear on my own." And we would be pretty foolish if we thought that we could handle Satan's attacks on our own. But you don't have to. Jesus is not only your brother, but he's your shepherd, the one looking around, and making sure that no harm comes to your soul. Micah prophesied this work of Jesus when he said, "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord."

Finally, Micah says that he's also one other thing: a conqueror.

The end of verse 4 says, "and they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach the ends of the earth." There's been a lot of talk about national security in the past few years. We had a border wall put up, but it looks like it now will be halted. The purpose of the wall was to make sure terrorists and drug dealers do not have easy access to our country. It was also to make sure people followed legal ways to enter our country. We have security at our airports to make sure that no one carries a bomb on board. And while we all want our government to do everything possible it can, in human terms, we can never have perfect security. We saw how a bomb exploded recently in an RV in Nashville. Fortunately, there was enough warning to save lives. But People make mistakes, people can't possibly know everything that's going on. People don't have full knowledge on how our enemies think and plan.

That's why it's so great that our Newborn King brings us one other blessing: security. Because these things that prevent us from having total security from our enemies aren't an issue with Jesus. Jesus is all-knowing. Jesus is all-powerful. He is going to make sure that all things that happen to you are for your long range good. Jesus is all-loving. Jesus is the perfect guardian for your body and soul. And his rule lasts forever.

Jesus was destined for greatness the minute he was born. The Bible said for centuries before his birth the astounding things he would do with his life. But Christ's greatness doesn't lie in him exalting himself, instead Jesus has shown his greatness by doing the unthinkable: by making wretched sinners like us heirs of heaven and co-rulers with him for all eternity. As you prepare to leave this Christmas Season behind for another year, remember what Christmas is all about: it's about Jesus becoming nothing so that you would have everything. It's about Jesus becoming a slave so that you would be a king or queen. Yes, Jesus, our Newborn King, is great because he makes us great. Amen