

THE FRIENDS OF ISRAEL TODAY

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Chris Katulka, Why Bethlehem?

You know, where you come from in some way defines you a bit. Even if you move far away from where you come from, it still defines you in some way. I was born in the Philadelphia area, and whenever I tell people from outside Philadelphia where I'm from I usually get at least three responses:

People would say... oh you're from Philadelphia... you must love Cheesesteaks... now cheesesteaks are great, but they aren't a part of my daily diet!

Other people would say... oh I've been to Philadelphia before... those people are rude... my response was always... Well, they're not rude they are just honest.

And finally people would say... oh... I've been to the Liberty Bell! And with a sense of pride I like to say Philadelphia is the "cradle of Liberty"

Where you come from can define you...

Look most of us have grown up knowing where Jesus was born... He was born in the tiny little town of Bethlehem that sits just about 5 miles south of Jerusalem.

But did you ever wonder WHY Jesus was born in Bethlehem? Because remember where you come from defines you.

Jesus' birth in Bethlehem wasn't an accident... it was predestined. The prophet Micah predicted Jesus' birth in Bethlehem saying this in Micah 5:2:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,
 who are too little to be among the clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
 one who is to be ruler in Israel,
whose coming forth is from of old,
 from ancient days.

Micah's prophecy was fulfilled in Matthew 2:1-6:

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with

him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet:

“And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.”

Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem is a symbol for Jesus’ entire ministry... it would define Him totally!

First, Bethlehem was a tiny little town, it wasn’t large at all, if you were driving on a highway during the days of Jesus you’d probably drive right past it and never even bat an eye. But even though it was small the significance of Bethlehem was huge for the Jewish people during the days of Jesus.

Bethlehem was so significant because the GREATEST King of Israel that ever lived was born and grew up in Bethlehem... his name was King David.

Listen to what 1 Samuel 16:1, 4 says, “The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from

being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” Samuel did what the LORD commanded and came to Bethlehem... it’s there Samuel will find the young shepherd boy David who would grow to become Israel’s greatest king. This little town in Judah produced greatness in Israel’s history.

God made special promises to David saying that through Him would come a series of Israelite kings that would be his sons, but that there would be ONE in His lineage that would rule as King forever and ever.

Jesus is a son of King David and being in born in Bethlehem screams to the Jewish people of that time, that Jesus is royalty. The city of Bethlehem is a royal city in the eyes of the Jewish people in the days of Jesus. Even those wise men who came to worship the baby Jesus knew He was royalty by presenting Him with gifts fit for a king... gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

So first we see that the little town of Bethlehem reveals to us the royalty of Jesus.

Micah's prophecy doesn't just tell us where the Messiah would be born... he tells us more than that... he tells us what kind of person He is.

Micah says the future ruler of Israel was to be born in Bethlehem, and that His, "coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." Some translations of the Bible say... from everlasting.

I find this section to be most interesting... in Micah's eyes the future ruler of Israel would be eternal in nature. How can a ruler from ancient days.

Now the gospels of Matthew and Luke give us the best history on the birth of Jesus, but the gospel of John gives us a different perspective of Jesus' birth... John wants to teach that Jesus may have been born in Bethlehem, but He is eternal and everlasting. Listen to the words of the Gospel of John in chapter 1 v 1-3, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.

Micah is able to combine the story of Jesus' birth in one prophetic verse... that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, but He comes from eternity past. He is more than any human king... He is

God! He is God come in flesh... listen to John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Look at all that we can learn about the birth of Jesus the Messiah from Micah’s prophecy made 700 years before the first advent of Christ. We learned about the place Jesus was born and how His birth in Bethlehem shows His royalty... He is the King of Israel. Then we saw how Micah’s prophecy revealed the deity of Jesus... that even though He was born in Bethlehem He’s been in existence for eternity.

Now we’re not through just yet... next week be sure to tune in because we’re going to look at one more aspect of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem... Micah in a different verse shows us exactly where Jesus was born in Bethlehem... and again it shows us more about the ministry of Jesus.