

“Roots - Jesus Come to Us from a Place”

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-6

Graphics: manger, roots, family tree, Bethlehem

Big Truth: Advent is a season of anticipation of Christ’s coming celebrated at Christmas, and is a time of opening ourselves once again to the living Christ coming to us in a new and unanticipated way. The story of Jesus, his family, his hometown, and his circumstance tell of a God who is redeeming and renewing the world through Jesus. The family story of Jesus intersects with your family’s story and invites us to invite Him deeper into our lives this season.

Focus Phrase: God uses the small, powerless, and hidden things to transform the big world for His glory.

1. Scripture

- A. This series is called ***Roots - Advent and the Family Story of Jesus***. Jesus came from someONE, someWHERE, and someTHING - a people, a place, and a story.
- B. Last week, we spent time discovering the PEOPLE of Jesus, Israel...and how the people of God wrestle, change, and then transform the world for Jesus.
- C. This week, we’ll take a deeper look at the “somewhere” - the place of Jesus’ birth. Bethlehem. Let’s pray and then dive into the gospel of Matthew...
- D. **PRAY! (Jesus, you are Lord...)**
- E. **READ Matthew 2:1-6**
- F. Jesus came from a people, Israel. AND, Jesus came from a place, Bethlehem, which was a nowhere town that wasn’t even on the way from somewhere else and certainly not a destination. Today, we’ll focus in on that PLACE...and what it means for us and the places WE have come from...or find ourselves.

2. Introduction

- A. Here’s our orienting question: **“How does Jesus’ birth in the small town of Bethlehem, an insignificant place in the land of Israel, give us fresh insights into how God works through the small and, seemingly insignificant, in this world?”**
- B. Each one of us has come, for better for worse, from a people, a place, and a story. I pray that over the past two weeks, you’ve had time to reflect meaningfully on your family tree, family heritage, your place, and your story.
- C. The family story of Jesus is the story of humanity. It reaches all the way back to Creation. That human story - our story - unfolded through the covenant God made with Abraham. It had begun to be fulfilled through Jacob, the wrestler...who became Israel, the people who wrestle with God. That human story was further revealed through Moses and Jesse and his son David. It was

foretold by the prophets, who faithfully proclaimed God's love and covenants with the people of Israel.

- D. Many of those prophecies - from Isaiah and Micah and Joel and Daniel - were about a person - the Messiah - who was anticipated for generations.
- E. And the prophecies came true the day Jesus was born. And we know that those prophecies are true because, among other things, Mary and Joseph gave birth to a son in the place that was foretold through hundreds of years of prophecy.
- F. And that **place** - that birthplace of Jesus - was **Bethlehem**. Today, we focus in on that place...where the most famous story in the history of the world took place...one night...in a stable out back.
- G. The story of Jesus and Bethlehem is an amazing story. Yet, it shouldn't be so for that town of Bethlehem. Bethlehem would still be a nowhere place - and maybe wouldn't even exist today, had it not been for Jesus.
- H. The connection that Jesus has with the land of Israel, and the little town of Bethlehem, shows us, without a doubt - that God loves to work through the very, very small - to change a big world.
- I. If you're taking notes this morning, here's something to chew on this week: **God uses the small, powerless, and hidden things to transform the big world for His glory.**

3. God works through the SMALL

- A. When Jesus was born, the town of Bethlehem had roughly 1,000 people living there. Now, for those of us who live in Panama, 1,000 people seems like a bunch of people! (sort of). If you live in larger places like Jamestown or the other suburbs of Panama, 1,000 people may seem small.
- B. God could've chosen a large place for the birth of His one and only Son. Yet, He didn't choose a place that was a well-known, big city, with lots of trade and social clout...or a long list of things to do and people to see. We know about 'destination cities' like the Big Apple, London, Rome, and others.
- C. Panama isn't even close to those, nor Jamestown nor even Buffalo (Go Bills!). Bethlehem wasn't even close to places like Jerusalem or Rome.
- D. YET...when God picked a 'destination' for the breaking-in of His Kingdom on earth, He went with the most insignificant and unknown place on the region's map - Bethlehem.
- E. Stacy and I spent some time in Bethlehem in 2018. It's where we started our Holy Land trip. And, I have to tell you, I was pretty underwhelmed by it. Sure, it funnels tourists very well, but it's kind of rundown, poor, and not very attractive. Some of that is because it's in the Palestinian territory. But I think God continues to keep Bethlehem humble...small.

- F. The name Bethlehem literally means House of Bread. There are not many thing more humble and small besides a loaf of bread. I had an elementary music teacher who, every time I saw her, would say, “I remember you when you were the size of a loaf of bread.” Small.
- G. It’s fitting that a place that’s named after bread is the very place that God chose to deliver to us the Bread of Life himself - Jesus. In John 6:35, Jesus said, “Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.’”
- H. God chose Bethlehem. God chose a baby. **God chooses the small.** I’m thankful for that. Sometimes you and I feel small. We feel physically small when we struggle with sickness or grief. We feel emotionally small when we’re hurting or stressed. We sometimes feel deflated, like a blowup lawn decoration when the power goes out.
- I. But, remember, God **CHOOSES** the small to do great things for His glory! Smallness has never once hindered God in doing His work in this world. In fact, he actually chooses the small and unknown through which to do his greatest work!
- J. If you feel small today, take heart! Be content in your smallness. God **IS** using you for His glory...like he did Bethlehem...and Jesus...and Panama... and us.
- K. But it’s not just the small that God chooses to use...

4. **God works through the POWERLESS**

- A. When you feel small, you may also feel powerless. Yet, when God uses the small to do big things, He also gives power to the powerless.
- B. The night Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, our opening scripture told us, the powerless became powered!
- C. In Luke’s gospel, the night Jesus was born, shepherds in the field were visited by angels! Talk about God’s power coming to the powerless servants of the Temple, in the middle of the night! The whole sky lit up with the heavenly host. And a powerful star appeared...so bright that the Magi knew, a while after, where the small, powerless child was born!
- D. And, there was Jesus, laid in the arms of his young mother Jesus - culturally, physically, and emotionally powerless in that moment to do much else besides adore her newborn son...the One who would save their people from their sin.
- E. Dan Wilt writes, “To feel powerless, without agency, is not a good feeling. God steps into the powerlessness we feel and says, ‘What about here and now we remember that I enter the world through the weak, the humble, and the vulnerable?’ We all can feel small and unseen, lost and unregarded, truly without power or ability to change things, at times. Our Father speaks to us, in that place,

that we are a place where heaven meets earth - and we, with the saints, are all God needs to launch a great awakening!”

- F. I don't know about you, but I'm ready for a great awakening! And I KNOW that God will use the small, powerless people, churches, and circumstances to do change the world if we pray and are faithful to His call to make disciples!
- G. One final piece of this is that God works through the HIDDEN things of this world for His glory.

5. God works through the HIDDEN

- A. If you're from Panama, don't take this as a slam, at all. I grew up in the suburbs of Buffalo, in Lancaster. When I was younger, it was a small town of 10,000 people and it was on a major set of roads. When we moved to Alden after we got married, I thought it was a small town - population 9,500 in 2018. but it was on Route 33 and Route 20. Then, we moved to Little Valley for my first appointment. Talk about small! Population: 1,100. Yet, still, it was the center of Cattaraugus County and everyone knew where it was.
- B. Then...(and you know where this is going, right?) we moved to Panama. Wow! Population 426 last I checked. The first day we were here, we witnessed goats being walked down the road, cows and deer running in the back yard, and one blinking light. Whenever we say we're from Panama for people outside the area, they automatically think we're from Central America. And when you describe how to get here, it's a little tricky.
- C. Panama is a bit hidden. And if you ask the average Panamanian, that's EXACTLY the way we like it! You all found it, today :)
- D. I imagine Bethlehem was hard to find if you weren't looking. It was 'near' other bigger places...but no one had Bethlehem as a destination on their GPS.
- E. The prophet Isaiah, hundreds of years before Jesus was born, wrote this about hiddenness and unattractiveness of Jesus, “He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.” Isaiah 53:2-3
- F. Like Bethlehem or Panama, Jesus can be hidden - out of the way - for so many. Even us, in times of grief and sadness. Our Blue Christmas worship service last Sunday was a powerful time of healing for laments in our lives which cause us to lose sight of Jesus in this Advent season. If you haven't had a chance to engage in that worship yet, you can see that on our website media page.
- G. Once Jesus finds us and we find that he has found us, the whole world opens up to us! All the things that are hidden will be revealed. All the darkness will be

brought into the light. All the secrets will be unearthed. And it's THEN and through THAT, that we discover the Hidden Lord in all his beauty and power and love and grace!

- H. Know this, church (look up here for a second): **God sees you. God knows you.** He sees you and knows you in your smallness...in your powerlessness... and in your hiddenness. AND, He is leading you to be a person who bears the glory of God and His gospel message into the world!
- I. “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler, who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.”
- J. Jesus...the one foretold...the one who was born...the one who died on the cross and the walk out of his own grave under his own power...HE is the One we anticipate...the One we search for and seek...the ONE who seeks and saves YOU and ME - small, powerless, and hidden.
- K. It's OK to sit with that...to be content in Him. Take time to be content in your smallness, powerlessness, and hiddenness in this season.
- L. And then let God use you - the small, powerless, and hidden things (and people) - to transform the big world for His glory.

6. Conclusion

- A. Many people, even Christians, work really hard these days to be popular on social media. Even churches strive to get more likes, comments, and shares. It's all about the algorithm. We do that under the auspices of proclaiming the Gospel, but there's an element of fame-seeking in it...and are we trying to bolster our own reputation through likes and shares?
- B. God is calling us, as followers of Jesus, to take the path of Bethlehem...and of Jesus. It's a path of the humble, then hidden, and powerless, and small.
- C. Take that path and follow your Lord into the kind of influence that doesn't need bells and whistles to accompany it. The path of Jesus carries with it the authority of the Ruler of the Cosmos.
- D. This Advent, be small in the presence of Jesus. Be powerless in Jesus' power. Be hidden so that Jesus is revealed in you and through you. Be content.
- E. When Stacy and I stood at the place where people think that the shepherds stood when the birth of Jesus was announced. We felt small, powerless, and hidden compared to the unsurpassed greatness of our Lord!
- F. He is LORD! And that's enough...in fact, more than we could ask or imagine! It all started in that little town of Bethlehem. And you're invited to let it continue in YOUR heart today!
- G. Let's pray...**PRAY!**