

RTM

reaching/teaching/ministering curriculum



Don't Forget!

**December 28th...
No BFGs Meeting
1 Worship at 10:30AM**

December 21, 2008 **Making the Religious, REAL-igious** **Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4-7**

MINISTERING HELPS

Group Prayer

Christmas can be a time where we get so busy, we don't get around to talking to the One whose birthday we are celebrating. During your prayer time, encourage folks to pray that God will help them to connect to the Christ of Christmas this year, and also find ways to connect those whom they are sharing the holiday with to the Lord.

Stay Connected

Assign all members and prospects who are absent today to class members who will contact them this week. Wish them a Merry Christmas, remind them that there will be NO BFGs meeting next week, and also encourage them to be at the next class meeting on January 4th.

REACHING HELPS

One of the two most common times for unchurched people to be found in church is Christmas Eve. You probably have family members who aren't that connected to the Lord or to church, but you will be sharing the holidays with them this year.

Why not make a Christmas Eve service a part of this year's plans?

FBC Allen will be hosting TWO Christmas Eve services this year at 4 PM and at 5:30 PM. This special service will be a time of singing Christmas carols, hearing the Christmas story, and sharing the Lord's supper together.

If you are hosting Christmas this year, bring your family. If you are visiting others out of town this year, why not find a Christmas Eve service you can take your family to?

TEACHING HELPS

We close out 2008 with a Christmas lesson designed to take the familiar story and ask some possibly not so familiar questions related to it.

What if each time we looked at a nativity scene over the next week, we were reminded of questions that challenged our faith? This lesson could do just that.

By the way, I pray that you have a GREAT CHRISTmas and look forward to another year of life-changing BFGs in 2009!

Making the Religious, REAL-igious ... Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4-20

What is the best promise ever fulfilled in your life? One of the most meaningful promises kept to me was from my dad. I was 13 and I was totally engrossed in deer hunting. I loved it because it was a guaranteed time of year when my brother, dad, and I would go out in the woods and “just have fun.” We never took hunting too seriously. We saw it as a time to enjoy sandwiches, snickers, home-made brownies, and hot chocolate. We laughed, made jokes, walked funny, talked funny, dressed up, and even played “deer games.” The fact is, most of the time we were scaring the deer not drawing them. In all, it was special because of our time together, bringing home a deer was simply a bonus.

After my second season of hunting with my great grandfather’s rifle from World War I, my father promised me his rifle. It was a 308 lever-action Savage with a Redfield Wide-field red-tipped cross hair scope. I couldn’t believe it, he was willing to give it to me and the only thing I had to do was maintain A’s for the year. (I was not a bad student but found out how good of a student I could be). With much work and effort, I pulled straight A’s. When it came time to pull out the rifles to sight them in, my dad said the magic words, “go get YOUR 308.” He had remembered! He had fulfilled his promise!! As you can imagine, for the next the two weeks all I could talk about was how my dad had kept his promise and had given me his deer rifle. I told everyone, friends, neighbors, and the little old ladies we shoveled snow for. That year I shot my first deer with his gun. Now I was on a mission, everyone in the world needed to know that my dad had kept his promise.

Jesus was not a last minute idea from God to save us from our sins. Jesus coming to save us from our sins was a promise made thousands of years before the birth of Jesus in the manger. Today’s lesson looks at the most specific promise God made about the birth of the Messiah, His fulfillment of that promise, and the appropriate response of those who witnessed His promise being fulfilled.

Teaching Points

Introduction...

- Ask members to recall a moment from their life where one of the following people made a promise that was fulfilled, and how the fulfillment impacted them...
 - ...a parent
 - ...a teacher
 - ...a spouse.
- Ask if they have ever made a promise that they had to work hard to keep? What was the payoff for making and keeping that promise?
- God made many promises to the world about the Messiah, who would someday come. A few of them are listed in the yellow box below that you may want to share with your group. Though many knew of these prophecies, not all who knew experienced them or even believed that they were being fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
- Let’s look at the fulfillment of Micah 5:2 and use it as a challenge to not miss the things God may be wanting to do in our lives today.

PROPHECIES AND THEIR FULFILLMENT ARRANGED CHRONOLOGICALLY

Would be the "Seed of a Woman" Prophecies [Genesis 3:15](#) / Fulfillment [Galatians 4:4](#) ([Luke 2:7](#); [Revelation 12:5](#))

Promised Seed of Abraham Prophecies [Genesis 18:18](#) ([Genesis 12:3](#)) / Fulfillment [Acts 3:25](#) ([Matthew 1:1](#); [Luke 3:34](#))

Promised Seed of Isaac Prophecies [Genesis 17:19](#) / Fulfillment [Matthew 1:2](#) ([Luke 3:34](#))

Promised Seed of Jacob Prophecies [Numbers 24:17](#) ([Genesis 28:14](#)) / Fulfillment [Luke 3:34](#) ([Matthew 1:2](#))

Will Descend from the Tribe of Judah Prophecies [Genesis 49:10](#) / Fulfillment [Luke 3:33](#) ([Matthew 1:2-3](#))

The Heir to the Throne of David Prophecies [Isaiah 9:7](#) ([Isaiah 11:1-5](#); [2 Samuel 7:13](#)) / Fulfillment [Matthew 1:1](#) ([Matthew 1:6](#))

Place of Birth Prophecies [Micah 5:2](#) / Fulfillment [Matthew 2:1](#) ([Luke 2:4-7](#))

Time of Birth Prophecies [Daniel 9:25](#) / Fulfillment [Luke 2:1-2](#) ([Luke 2:3-7](#))

Born of a Virgin Prophecies [Isaiah 7:14](#) / Fulfillment [Matthew 1:18](#) ([Luke 1:26-35](#))

Massacre of Infants Prophecies [Jeremiah 31:15](#) / Fulfillment [Matthew 2:16](#) ([Matthew 2:17,18](#))

Flight into Egypt Prophecies [Hosea 11:1](#) / Fulfillment [Matthew 2:14](#) ([Matthew 2:15](#))

—THOMPSON CHAIN - OUTLINE STUDY SERIES

The Promise ... Prophecy (*Micah 5:2*)

²But 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 ancient times.

Micah chapter 5 reveals the most specific detail about the Messiah's birth. Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, wrote in the eighth century, a little over 700 years before Jesus' birth. Foretelling that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem, Micah's words were known by every devout Jew. They longed for the day when the Messiah would come, and because of Micah 5:2, He would surely come from Bethlehem.

Bethlehem was a well known city but not of great stature. Its population was thought to be less than 1000. King David had been born in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:1; 17:12), and every devout Jew understood that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. (see Matt. 2:3-6) However, the city itself had little to offer Judah, especially since it was so small compared to the huge capital city Jerusalem that was only six miles away. Its significance and impact was to be spiritual not economic.

As one examines the promise/prophecy of Micah and the birth of Jesus, he concludes there was not a lack of knowledge or understanding within the Jewish culture about this promise. The Jews knew all the facts regarding the prophecies about the Messiah. The problem was, Jesus did not live up to the added expectations they had concocted to go along with the prophecies. Ultimately, they were looking for a Messiah that would fulfill their purposes within their religious activities and promote their religious and political ambitions. Surely a baby born in a stable could not save the Jews.

1. The Promise... Micah 5:2

- Ask the following questions as a game to help your group gain some perspective on this prophesy...
 - Micah gave this prophesy about the Messiah _____ years before the birth of Jesus. (700)
 - Micah was a prophet who served at the same time as _____ who was another famous prophet. (Isaiah)
 - The population of Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth was less than 100, 500, 1000? (1000, or roughly the size of Fairview, TX)
 - Another famous person who had been born in Bethlehem was _____ . (David)
 - The capital city of Jerusalem was _____ miles from Bethlehem. (6)
- Jesus birth in a smaller more insignificant place is in line with God's usual operating procedure. Many great Bible people were obscure when they were called out, but through God's activity in their life became world changers. Who do you recall in the Bible with such a story? What does that remind us about ourselves if we feel small and insignificant? What does it say to us if we think we are important?



The Fulfillment ... Jesus' Birth (Luke 2:4-7)

⁴So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

At the appointed time, Joseph was required by law to go to Bethlehem. Augustus had ordered a census. This would allow Rome to determine the taxation on the Jews, as well as keep tabs on rogue zealots within the Jewish community. Joseph, his family having moved from Bethlehem to Nazareth at some point most likely for work, began the journey with his wife. Luke notes that at this point Mary and Joseph, although living together, had not completed the traditional marriage ceremony of consummation. They were still engaged and Mary still a virgin. (See last week's lesson for information regarding Hebrew marriage traditions.)

Mary's presence with Joseph is for several reasons. First, both understood that their son was the Messiah and must be born in Bethlehem. Second, no one would have expected Mary to give birth without her husband near. She would have been living with Joseph and his family for less than 5 months at this time. Her rightful place was with her husband. Third, this event was arranged by God. Jesus would be born in Bethlehem as the Messiah prophesied by Micah 700 years before.

Luke abbreviates Mary's story by explaining the pauper-like birth of Jesus. When they reached Bethlehem the city was crowded. All of David's ancestry was required to register with Rome; and by the time they had reached a place to rest, there was no room indoors. Joseph was led to a stable by the inn-keeper and there the Messiah was born. Wrapped tightly in spare clothing Mary and Joseph had brought for the trip, Mary placed Jesus in a manger while she rested from the delivery. The Messiah was here. God himself was on earth, lying in a manger, in Bethlehem, as promised by Micah.

One can make much of the innkeeper's denial, and yet what choice did he have? His place, along with every square inch of Bethlehem, was crawling with weary travelers coming from near and far to register with the Roman government. No room truly meant no room. Being compassionate, the innkeeper did give Joseph the next best thing. Although dirty, it would have been private, dry, and somewhat shielded from the elements. There, in a stable, was where God was born. Although unlike any Jew had dreamed it would happen, their Messiah lay in a bed of hay.

The Response ... Adoration (Luke 2:8-20)

⁸And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

2. The Fulfillment... Luke 2:4-7

- What were the circumstances that caused Joseph and Mary to end up in Bethlehem at the time for the birth of Jesus? What about your life? What can you recall from your own life story where God had you in the right place, at the right time so that you could find and do his will?
- What were the excuses that Joseph could have used not to register and not to make the trip? Why do you think they made the difficult trip? How do you know when a difficulty is God saying "don't do it" or "persevere through it?"
- How do you think Mary had imagined the birth of her baby as she was growing up? How do you think it matched up to birthing a baby in the presence of animals and hay? What can Mary teach us about trusting God when things aren't working out like we thought they might turn out?

¹²*This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."*

¹³*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, ¹⁴"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests."*

¹⁵*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."*

¹⁶*So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.*

¹⁹*But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.*

3. The Response... Luke 2:8-20

- The shepherds were not the most esteemed part of society, and the jobs they had meant they were working the night shift. If the birth of Jesus had happened today, who might the angels have appeared to? What does that say about who God cares for and wants to reveal himself to? What does it say about how we should think about folks like the shepherds?
- When the shepherds got the word from the angels, what did they do about it? How long did they delay? How does God talk to us today? When God reveals something about Himself to us, what do we do about it? How long do we delay? What can the shepherds of Christmas remind us to do with God's word to us?
- After seeing Jesus, how did the passage describe the shepherds as they left the manger? Glorifying and praising God is another way of saying they worshipped God. Where did the worship take place? What does this say to us about worship? How should the shepherds' part of the story challenge us to expand our worship of the Lord?

Luke gives Mary's second account of that night. Presumably after Mary had given birth, a group of shepherds were watching their sheep on the outskirts of town when *an angel of the Lord appeared to them*. Terrified and confused, the shepherds listened as the angel proclaimed the birth of the Messiah. *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.* ¹²*This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.* Immediately after this announcement, the sky was consumed with an angelic presence *praising God* and glorifying the heavenly Father. The response was contagious. Surely the shepherds put two and two together and they immediately agreed, *"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."* The excitement and emotions they experienced were overwhelming.

They found the child just as the Angel had foretold. The conversation among the men and Mary and Joseph must have been intriguing. Mary told her story of encountering an angel which told her that she would carry the Messiah. Joseph explained that once he learned of Mary's pregnancy his plan was to divorce her, but an angelic dream identified the child as the Messiah. The shepherds then explained how the sky was filled with angels at the proclamation of the Messiah's birth and they had hurried from their hillside until they found the child. The stories that were revealed were the interweaving of almighty God's sovereign plan. There could only be one response. They quickly spread the news of their experience, amazing all who heard, but uncertain to the results.

Only one response would do for both the angels and shepherds, they adored the God who fulfilled His promise of the Messiah. *The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.* The activity of the night consumed them and only allowed for a response of glory and praise. Glory identifies and acknowledges the acts of God. Praise proclaims the acts of God. Praise requires the company of at least one while God glory requires the acknowledgment of God's work. Both are evident as the shepherds proclaim the acts of God to both themselves and the city of Bethlehem. They could tell others, the messiah is come.

Conclusion/Application

Micah's promise was fulfilled as witnessed by the shepherds, angels, and Mary and Joseph. The Messiah had come, but why had so few recognized it? The Jews by this point were continuing in their religion, i.e. they observed the law and all its process and procedures, but they didn't get the REAL part. They were so caught up in doing their religious activities that they didn't take time to look around to see what God was doing. The knowledge was present but the relationship had gone.

Our caution is the same today. We must be cautious about our traditions, preferences, and "works." Many of them begin out of a committed relationship to God and have value and opportunity. However, we must be cautious to not be so engrossed in ministry, programs, knowledge, preferences, activity, etc., that we concoct our own religiousness and are blind to what God is doing around us. We often blame the Jewish leaders for this and rightfully so, but are we guilty of the same?

Let's be honest, in Collin County there is a church on every corner and in every elementary school; there are books promoting religion in every mall, plaza, and grocery store; there are seminary educated individuals around every corner; and radio and television preachers flood the airwaves. One does not have to look hard to know about God, Jesus, or religion. Yet, all of this religious activity, we would agree, does not make our community religious. It possibly makes our community much like that of the first century, blinded by our own ambitions of religion.

The same God who spoke to and did amazing things in the life of Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds that night is the same God who invites us to be in relationship with Him today. Mary, Joseph and the shepherds had to get out of their comfort zones when God made it clear what their next step was; and as they did, they experienced some amazing things. They saw and experienced things that prophets, kings and true believers in God have longed to see for thousands of years. The promises made to these folks years before Jesus were now coming to pass right in front of Mary, Joseph and the shepherds.

What is God wanting you to experience, that you are missing because you are unwilling to take a step of faith and get out of your comfort zone? It is time for those who are Christians to get REAL-igious. Our willingness to step out in faith and experience God's activity and power will not only be a blessing to us, but will also be an opportunity for those you know who are apart from Christ to see God's activity and will be a witness for them to believe in Jesus as well.

As we contemplate the first Christmas in our celebrating this week, let's make our prayer to the Lord something like this... "Lord, just as Mary, Joseph and the shepherds experienced your amazing work in their day, I want to experience your amazing work in my day. I know you are at work, so help me to step out in faith as they did so that I won't miss your amazing activity.

Application Points

- The story tells of those who saw the events of the birth of Jesus, but how many missed it completely?
 - What are reasons the "religious" people might have missed Jesus, not only at His birth but throughout all of His 33 years of being on earth in the flesh?
 - What are reasons the "not-religious" people might have missed Jesus, not only His birth but during His 33 years on earth?
- Is God still revealing Jesus to people on earth? How can we help the religious people not to miss what He wants to do today?
- How can we help the not-religious people not to miss what He wants to do for them through Jesus today?
- What are the "religious" things we do that are keeping us from connecting fully to the Christ of Christmas?