

Christmas Eve 2025
Micah 5:2-5a; Matthew 1:18-25
The Heart: Love Made Flesh

The levels and depth of Scripture is amazing, more than we can probably ever fully grasp. Tonight, we will look at love and how full and caring this love is that comes down from God and is reflected in at least some of the people that we read about in the Bible.

Joseph was set to marry Mary until the news that she was pregnant. Very easily our thought could lead us to say, "Well, it was an arranged marriage anyway, so it's not like he really loved her." This is quite likely a false idea that comes from a later time in history when fathers would try to marry their daughters up in class in order to provide a better life for their daughter but also with the hope of gaining improved status for themselves. Those marriages had much less to do with love than Mary and Joseph, not that we know the depth of their love at this point. But it would be good to know that within the clans and families of Israel it was the norm of loving parents to try to arrange a marriage with spouse who would hold the same love of God, which would bring with it mutual respect and caring, and more than likely love over time.

So, the family roots matter and as we will find from just the first verse of our reading from Micah that love runs deep. King David was from Bethlehem, and he loved God and was faithful and trusted God to be with him as saved the people from the Philistines. Joseph of course was descended from David, but we should look backwards, too. We have mention of Ephrathah, which is largely overlooked, but it was the place where Rachel was buried. Rachel was the mother of the earlier Joseph who saw God's people through the famine in Egypt, again a savior. Rachel was the wife Jacob loved and was willing to do anything for in order to marry her.

Going back before that we have Jacob going back Haran to find a faithful wife, from the land where their clan lived; believers in the one true God. Isaac didn't want him marrying someone like Esau did in marrying an unbelieving Canaanite.

So, Micah is actually referencing love in marriage going back several centuries, both in love for each other and in love for God. It goes back farther than that as we look to the next line where it speaks of a ruler whose origin is from ancient times. Using a term like "ancient times" goes way back. While the United States is almost 250 years old we don't talk about George Washington as being from ancient times, unless maybe you are seven or eight years old.

In Micah's prophecy, he is taking us all the way back to the beginning, to the Almighty ruler of heaven and earth, who made us to be in a loving relationship with him. God was and is fully committed to the relationship he first began with Adam and Eve in the garden. While they sought a divorce in a manner of speaking God always sought to restore the marriage. It would require the people knowing how much he loved them, and so we see throughout the Old Testament how God cared for his people, even when it seemed like God had abandoned them. A punishment like the captivity to the Assyrians and the Babylonians gave a feeling of abandonment but in fact God said they would be restored as Micah now tells.

This ruler who was to come would stand and shepherd his flock with the strength of the Lord. This means this ruler would be the Lord for no mere man could possess such strength. And to stand with the strength of the Lord meant he could never be defeated, even by death as we now know. As a good shepherd cares for his sheep in a way similar to caring for one's own family he brings safety, which brings a sense of peace. Worries are gone when you have a great, loving defender. When you have someone watching over you like that how can you not love him.

Joseph knew the love of God which brought him the peace he needed to take Mary as his wife. Mary knew the love of God and undoubtedly saw it in Joseph and loved him. When they saw the baby Jesus they knew that love had come down to earth. God was with them and in them. The glory of the Lord was with them and they saw the one whom Micah and Isaiah spoke about; the one who would draw all nations back to him who had abandoned the relationship long ago.

As Jesus called himself the bridegroom and called us his bride, may we know that God arranged this marriage. In this case it is almost like the arranged marriages meant to raise one's status in life. We weren't worthy of such a good God but his love for us claimed us and through baptism we were made his own. If one didn't know God's love before Christ's birth they should be able to see it now and this is why Micah would go on to prophecy the return of many who had long gone astray. God in the flesh is an enduring indication of the love He has for us. It might have taken a little time for Mary and Joseph to have an abiding love but that may merely serve as an example to show that our love for God may also be one that grows deeper each day. Let us pray that it does. Amen.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans^a 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."

³ Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor bears a son,
and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.

⁴ 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.

⁵ And he will be our peace