



HOME GROUP & DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL

“Bethlehem” – Jacqui Rivas – 12.12.2021

Sermon link:



Scripture

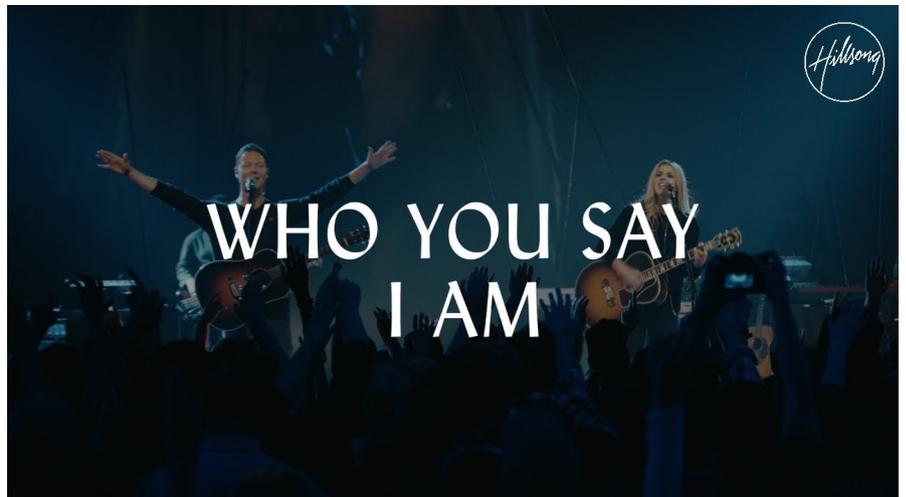
Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:6

Open your mind and heart as you read the passage of Scripture aloud and then again quietly to yourself. Listen for God’s word to you.

Observation

Micah 5:2 and Matthew 2:6

Bethlehem (the house of bread) was mentioned several times in the Old Testament, in spite of it being an insignificant town. Jacob buried his beloved wife, Rachel, there. It is the home town of King David who was born and later anointed by Samuel there. At one time in its history it was controlled by a Philistine garrison (2 Samuel 23:14-16) and was fortified by king Rehoboam in his attempt to hang on to Judea after the northern tribes defected over 900 years before the birth of Christ (2 Chronicles 11:5-12). In addition it was the home town of Naomi (Ruth 1:19) and Boaz, and later of Ruth. It was named by Micah as being the town where the Messiah would come from (Micah 5:2-5) and the Jewish leaders were well aware of this prophecy.



Spend some time in worship.

The town is situated on a grey limestone ridge about 760m high, nestled between two summits, so it looks as if it is sitting in a saddle. It is about eight kilometres south of Jerusalem. The houses of the

town were built on the sides of the ridge and many had caves into the hillside behind them. It may well have been in one of these caves that Jesus was born.

On a clear day the hills around Bethlehem can be seen from the Mount of Olives.

Little is known of ancient Bethlehem although the site was occupied from prehistoric times with flints and split animal bones having been found there. Constantine built a church over the cave where Jesus is purported to have been born. The Samaritans partially destroyed this church in the sixth century AD. It was rebuilt by Justinian and still stands today as one of the oldest church buildings in existence. To enter the church one has to go through a very low door so each person bows low in humility to enter a place which may well be the actual birthplace of Jesus, although no one will ever know exactly which cave it was the family used.

Herod's anger probably only affected a handful of families as he ordered the slaughter of the small boys and babies in Bethlehem in his attempt to stop the rise of a rival king because Bethlehem was such a small place. As a result the event did not attract the attention of any ancient historians. Bethlehem now sits at the heart of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. No Jews are allowed to live in the town, and the Christian population is estimated to be a mere 3% of the population.



The square outside the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. The large doors ahead of the visitors are closed and have a tiny door in them so anyone entering the church has to stoop down and enter in a position of humility and worship.

One of the caves in the hillside in Bethlehem. Shepherds would have kept their sheep safe inside. Notice the dark, smoke-stained roof.



Advent Meditations

Day 1

What does your birthplace mean to you? Are you still connected to it or have you moved away? How does it affect who you are?

Day 2

This year there may be spaces around the Christmas table which were filled last year. Spend some time thanking God for the memories of those whom you have lost this year. Ask Him to comfort you and the others who will be present.

Day 3

Do you feel you belong at Gracepoint? What makes you know this is so? How can you help others to feel the same this Christmas?

Day 4

What dreams do you have, in spite of any losses you may have experienced during the year? Ask God to re-ignite your dreams and to show you what to do as a first step to fulfilling them today.

Day 5

What do you need to let go of in order to experience a new beginning? Spend some time with God asking Him to show you what needs to be done, then step forward in faith, confident of His love for you, and let the past go. This may be an on-going process rather than a once-off event, but keep asking God to help you. He is faithful.

Bibliography

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