

December 4, 2005

“The Perfect Place”
Matthew 2:1-12

FCF: Confusion over “the perfect gift”

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because the Incarnation manifests God’s wondrous glory,
(magnet) we should carefully consider and live out its implications.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

“The Perfect Gift.” The season of shopping for the great find, the great quest, is upon us. But what makes the “perfect gift”? Is it the color, the size, or the label? Must it be a surprise or can it come from a list? Must it be something everyone else has or need it be the rarest of finds? And where is it to be found – the mall, a catalog, or E-Bay?

Good questions, each one, but none of them really gets to what makes “the perfect gift”. For such a gift must be that which is given out of love from the giver with the best in mind for the recipient. And with that definition, we would have to say that ultimately, the perfect gift is the One whose birth we celebrate this season – the Lord Jesus Christ.

“The Perfect Gift” is the theme for the messages this month. And we’ll begin with a reading from Matthew 2 – a familiar text that points us to “The Perfect Place”.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Matthew 2:1-12](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION – *In His coming, the King shows His kingdom.*

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

([READ Wangerin quote, p.147](#)) “*Christmas should not copy us. We should copy Christmas.*” I came across those words while reading Walter Wangerin’s little book, *In the Days of the Angels*. “*Christmas should not copy us. We should copy Christmas.*” There’s great wisdom in that simple but profound statement. Think with me. We have been made in God’s image, according to His likeness. As amazing as that sounds, we have been made in many ways like Him. That is to say, what He is like is how we were made to be. Our lives are meant to be patterned by His ways. That’s Basic Theology 101. Sounds simple enough. But it begs a question: What then are His ways like?

Or, using Wangerin’s quote, what about Christmas should we copy? What do we see that tells us how we are to be – especially in Jesus’ birth in this town of Bethlehem? Matthew is quoting in verse 6 from Micah chapter 5 ([READ Micah 5:1-5a](#)). A hard time for Israel. Destruction and exile for her rebellion and sin are on the horizon. But as bleak as this news would have been, the prophet makes clear all is not lost. A new age is dawning and it will come through a new ruler – the Messiah. Indeed, Micah tells the people not only of who is coming but where it will come about – Bethlehem. And eight centuries later, as we see recorded for us in Matthew 2, that’s exactly what happens. The chief priests and scribes knew this is where it was to be and the Magi went on their way.

Now what are implications of this for us? Why does it matter that Jesus would have in fact been born in the place of which Micah spoke – why does it matter to us and how? *What do we learn from Christmas? And how should we copy it?*

I. WONDER OF PROPHECY

Bethlehem was in every way the perfect place for Jesus to be born. Why? Several reasons. First, simply because it was the place prophesied through Micah.

A) The Foretelling

Micah’s prophetic words were a foretelling of what was to come. A foretelling.

1. The LORD spoke

What do I mean by that? The LORD spoke. The Creator of all that there is and ever will be, the Sustainer of this universe, the One who had called out a people for Himself spoke.

2. The prophet spoke

And so the prophet spoke. Micah was the LORD's servant. And, knowing who had spoken – his Master – he then spoke as well. Think back to Amos (**READ Amos 3:8**).

B) *The Implication*

Now, what is the implication of this? Some very simple but vital truths.

1. He is there

That God is there. That there is someone out there. That we are truly not alone.

2. He is not silent

That He is there and that He is not silent. That He has a voice and that He speaks to us. Down through the corridors of time He plans, looks, and speaks. We see it here – from way back in the 8th century to events in the 1st century echoing now into the 21st century.

Application:

The simple fact of spoken and fulfilled prophecy. Now you might think that obvious. Listen, it's a cold world out there – enough to cause chill deep within. These are burning words of warmth, of hope. Someone is there. We are not alone. This isn't all there is. He's there and He's speaking. He's there and He's seeing. There are no surprises. There was no surprise in heaven at Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. Let that settle into your bones and then let it settle the fears of your heart. The wonder of prophecy.

II. **WORKING OF PROVIDENCE**

But also the working of providence. (**READ [Heidelberg Catechism 27](#)**):

What do you understand by the providence of God? Providence is the almighty and ever present power of God by which he upholds, as with his hand, heaven and earth and all creatures, and so rules them that leaf and blade, rain and drought, fruitful and lean years, food and drink, health and sickness, prosperity and poverty – all things, in fact, come to us not by chance but from his fatherly hand.

A) *Things Readily Apparent*

1. The Nativity

Think of the Nativity. Here you have just the right people, in just the right place, at just the right time. It seems as though all things were driven to this event, to bring it about.

2. The census

Think of the census of Caesar Augustus mentioned in Luke's Gospel. Here is the mightiest ruler on earth, thinking he is in control, serving as but one of God's instruments. (**READ [Spurgeon quote](#)**) "It was Caesar's whim but it was God's decree."

B) *Things Behind the Scenes*

1. Declaration of what would be

And God had determined from the beginning of time to do this. He had announced it in its seed form there in the Garden of Eden (**READ [Genesis 3:15](#)**). The program is laid out.

2. Orchestration of what would be

It was the declaration of what would be. And then, over time, we see an orchestration of what would be as well. Look behind the curtain. See the preservation of a genealogy, the matching of a couple, the raising and ruling over an empire. God's providence.

Application:

Can you not see His rule – the almighty and ever present power of God? In and over all things, even the things of our lives today? His ways have not changed. All things come from His fatherly hand – the highs and the lows, the things we gladly include in the Christmas letter and the things we manage to leave out. All for His glory. All for our good. All from His hand. Let that settle into your bones and encourage your heart.

III. WAYS OF HIS POWER

The wonders of prophecy, the workings of providence. And one last thing – the ways of His power. How does God delight to work? What should we expect?

A) *To the Lowly*

Bethlehem is little. Yet God's power was exercised on her behalf – to the lowly.

1. Bethlehem's place

Bethlehem's standing was of one regarded not worth mentioning by cartographers, not worth conquering by foreign nations – a standing of one seen as the least, as insignificant.

2. Not expected

Bethlehem is a town without a place in the eyes of her countrymen. And this unexpected place is the very place designated from ancient times as the place of the Savior's birth. Clearly part of the message is that no one is insignificant, that no one is without worth.

Illustration:

Francis Schaeffer was walking the streets of France with a group of friends. They passed a prostitute and he stopped and asked her, "*How much?*" She gave him her price. He replied, "*No, how much?*" She gave her price again. "*I do not mean that,*" he said. "*I mean, how much are you worth?*" She was worth far more than she knew – worth the Savior's coming in this shocking way through means seemingly too small, too little.

B) *Through the Lowly*

Bethlehem shows the LORD's power exercised on behalf of the lowly. And, shocking as that may be, we see His power being exercised through the lowly as well.

1. Bethlehem's place

Again, remember Bethlehem's place. Small, insignificant. Some history, yes, but no power. This was no Jerusalem. This was no Rome. The Messiah through Bethlehem?

2. Not expected

This was unexpected – certainly in Micah's day. Apparently in Matthew's as well.

Application:

The lesson is plain. No one is without worth. And no one is without a place. (READ 1 Corinthians 1:26-31). Our God is not in the least dependent on us. Not in the least. He delights to work through what is weak that He might all the more show forth His glory and so transform our foolish boasting into gratitude, praise, and faith.

Do you hear? God delights to work through weakness! He is not hampered by us! He is glorified through us! What does that mean? That we are free to stop obsessing over how qualified or talented we are or how many answers we have or anything else! What we have is not the point! It's a heart to serve and feet to move. God does the work. So let us go out with humility and boldness for Christ came for and through Bethlehem!

CONCLUSION:

Listen. Bethlehem was the perfect place. "*Christmas should not copy us. We should copy Christmas.*" What then is Christmas? What then should we copy and how? It shows us prophecy, providence, and power. Think of the Magi here in Matthew 2.

Think of was involved in their seeking of this one born King of the Jews. These pagan astrologers were wise men indeed. Think of the careful study, the arduous journey, the humble questions, the extravagant worship. Men transformed, lives shaped by the wondrous realities of Christmas and the way this newborn King was showing forth the ways of His kingdom from the moment of His birth. May it be true of us as well.

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