

# Bethlehem: The Little Town with a Big Legacy

by Rev. Corey Turnpenny, 2019 for the Whitney Point United Methodist Church, Whitney Point NY

## Week 1 - Bethlehem's Beginnings

1. What do you know about the 'little town of Bethlehem' besides it being the birthplace of Jesus?

The first mention of Bethlehem in scripture is in Genesis!

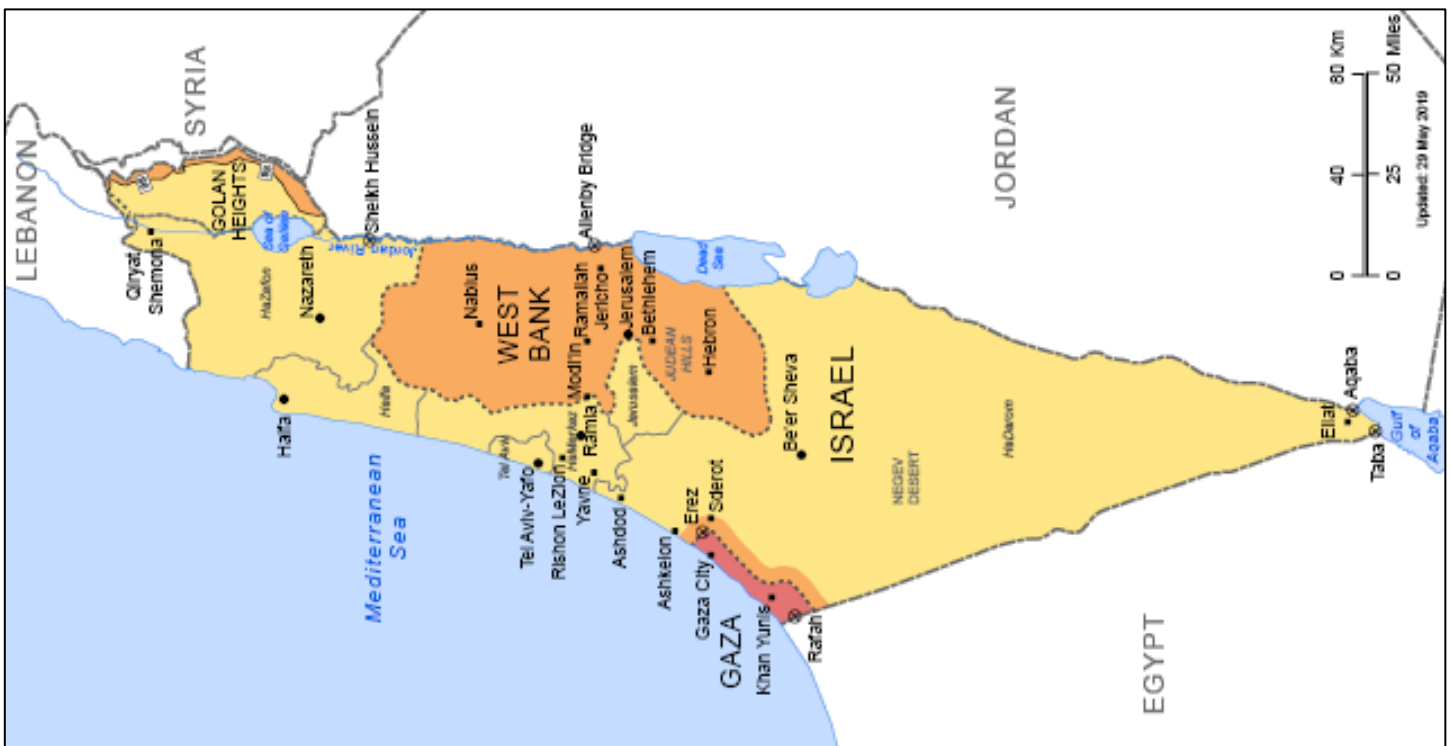
**Read Genesis 35:9-21**

2. Who was buried in Bethlehem?

Where is this little town, anyway?

בֵּית לֶחֶם *Bet Lehem*, Hebrew pronunciation: [bet 'lexem], "House of Bread"; is a city located in the central West Bank, Palestine, about 6.2 miles south of Jerusalem.

But look how far it is from Nazareth!



1 Chronicles 2:51 tells us Bethlehem was founded by Salma, son of Caleb. But the next major mention of Bethlehem in the Bible can be found in the book of Ruth.

**Read the entire Book of Ruth** (it's only 4 chapters!)

3. Why do you think this town was called Bethlehem meaning 'house of bread'?

4. What does the story of Ruth reveal to us about God and God's Way?

5. The final sentence of the book of Ruth gives us a big clue to the coming prominence of this little town. Later in scripture Bethlehem would come to be known as the 'City of \_\_\_\_\_' who?

## Week 2 – Bethlehem’s First Claim to Fame

Three generations after Ruth, Israel was under the rule of their first king, Saul. But God sent the prophet Samuel to visit a grandson of Ruth and Boaz, Jesse. God told Samuel one of Jesse’s 8 sons would be the next king.

**Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13**

**Read 1 Samuel 17:16-58**

1. What verse references bread?

2. What does the story of David tell us about God and God’s Way?

After many trials and battles, the young shepherd boy would eventually be crowned king of Israel. And though he was not a perfect man, he is most often remembered as Israel’s greatest king.

3. What else do you know about David?

A reflection from Dr. James Boice

“O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie.”

It was just a little town; Micah’s prophecy points that out quite clearly. “Though thou be little among the thousands of Judah” (Micah 5:2).

To this little town, a hungry Moabitess names Ruth came seeking bread. She was poor, she was a Gentile, she was a widow. But in the little town of Bethlehem she found much more than she had dreamed.

To this little town, a prophet named Samuel came, searching for a king for Israel. God rejected the obvious candidates and chose young David, whom everyone else had overlooked.

To this little town, Joseph and Mary came, seeking lodging. The inn was full and so Mary brought forth her first-born son in a manger. He was the Bread of Life for whom Ruth searched; the King of kings for whom Samuel searched; the haven of rest for whom Joseph and Mary searched.

It was just an insignificant little town, despised by many, overlooked by others.

Paul says that God often chooses the “low and despised” (see 1 Corinthians 1:28). The prophet Zechariah asks, “Who has despised the day of small things?” (see Zechariah 4:10).

God is not impressed with size. God delights in the wisdom of the ant just as much as the power of the elephant; God enjoys the beauty of the sheltered violet as much as the splendor of the sun-drenched sunflower.

Bethlehem, Ruth, David, Mary — insignificant perhaps — but they were all given splendor because they allowed themselves to be used by God.

4. Have you ever felt like a Bethlehem, small, insignificant, overlooked, maybe even despised?

5. Who might be coming to you, searching?

How might God want to use you even as He used humble Bethlehem to meet those needs?

Of Bethlehem it is sung: “The hopes and fears of all the years Are met in thee tonight.”

Though you too may feel yourself to be little among the thousands, pray that God will use you to meet the hopes and fears of someone this very day.

## Week 3 – The Line of David

**Read Matthew 1:1-17** (May cause drowsiness.)

Looking for the answers to the questions below will help you stay awake!

1. Which names do you recognize? Who are they?

Matthew starts out naming the 3 most important guys right at the top, Abraham, David, and Jesus. (He really wanted to prove to his Jewish audience that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah.) However, breaking from tradition, Matthew includes several women in the genealogy of Jesus..

2. Who are the five women named or referenced?

**Read Genesis 38:1-30**

3. What words would you use to describe Tamar?

**Read Joshua 2:1-24, 6:1-2, 25**

4. What words would you use to describe Rahab?

We read Ruth's story last week.

5. What words would you use to describe Ruth?

**Read 2 Samuel 11:1-15, 26, 12:15b-25**

6. What words would you use to describe Bathsheba?

Tamar was a trickster. Rahab was a sex worker. Ruth was a foreigner (well, they all were).  
Bathsheba was a rape survivor.

7. Why do you think these women would be included in the genealogy of Jesus?

8. How has reading the stories of these women (and men) in Jesus' family tree helped to inform your understanding of God's plan and God's Way? How have these stories broadened your understanding of the Christmas story?

## Week 4 – Bethlehem’s Legacy

### **Read Matthew 2:1-6**

1. Who prophesized the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem? (check the footnotes)

The scholars of King Herod’s court were well aware of this prophecy and directed the magi to Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). In fact, later in Jesus’ ministry, some rejected him because they thought he was born in Nazareth, and the Messiah, by prophecy, should come from Bethlehem (John 7:42).

But Bethlehem will always be remembered as the birthplace of Jesus. As Jews, Mary and Joseph would have known all about the history this little town. They would have passed Rachel’s tomb and the “town gate”, Bethlehem’s business center, where Boaz gained the right to marry Ruth. The shepherds were minding flocks in perhaps the same fields where David had run a thousand years earlier when angels filled the sky and announced that a new king was born.

Sadly as a result of Jesus’ birth in this little town another prophecy was fulfilled..

### **Read Matthew 2:16-23**

2. Who prophesized the “massacre of the innocents”?

3. How does this part of the story change or challenge how you read the Christmas story?

4. What other prophecies were there about Jesus?

**Read Isaiah 9:2-7, 11:1-6, 61:1-4**

**Read Luke 4:17-21**

5. Reading Isaiah's prophecies, how would you describe the Messiah in your own words?

6. Do you think Jesus fit people's ideas or expectations of a Messiah?

There are still more prophecies about the Christ from prophets of Jesus' day.

**Read Luke 2:25-38**

7. Who were the prophets the holy family encountered at the temple and what did they prophesy?

8. How does understanding the legacy of Jesus' birthplace help you understand him as the Messiah?