

December 2, 2021

*“But 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.”*

– Micah 5:2

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Thank you to all of you who reached out to Pastor Linda last Sunday to wish her well on her retirement. We are grateful for all the years she has served this congregation with grace and compassion. Whether in a hospital room, a pulpit, or a kitchen, she always shared the love of Christ. She and her husband Paul moved this week to be closer to their son and grandchildren in Ohio. If you would like to send a card to the Pokrajacs, you can mail or drop it by the church, and we will forward it on to them.

Pastor Linda introduced our Advent sermon series, *A Savior is Born*, offered through RightNow Media. Last week, we considered the story of Gabriel announcing to Mary that she would bear a child, and the hope the coming Messiah brought to the Jewish people.

This week, we are looking to the little town of Bethlehem. Long before Mary and Joseph arrived, Bethlehem had been prophesied to be the birthplace of the Messiah. It was the town where Jacob lost his beloved Rachel in childbirth. And it was the town where two mourning widows came to find hope in their despair.

“Call me Mara (which means bitter),” Naomi tells her friends when she returns to Bethlehem from the distant land of Moab. She was childless and grandchildless, which was the worst possible state for a widow – except for her daughter-in-law who was not only childless but also a foreigner in a strange land. There was no one to take care of them. Naomi was too old to bear children with a new husband. She felt she had nothing but bitterness left. And yet, God was not done with their story.

In each turn of the story, we see evidence of God’s hand. They returned just at the time of the barley harvest. The field where Ruth gathered grain was owned by one of the only people who could redeem the land that had belonged to Naomi’s husband. This Kinsman-Redeemer, Boaz, was willing to marry this foreign woman. They gave their first child, Obed, to Naomi. And that child had a child named Jesse, who had a child named David, who became king over all of Israel, and whose descendant was a man named Joseph who welcomed a baby born in a manger in the same little town of Bethlehem.

Have you had seasons in your life where it seems like God is far away? We name ourselves Bitter or Rejected or Failure or Invisible. But even in the midst of our despair, God is working out a plan to redeem us. He is pulling together threads in His magnificent tapestry that seem completely disconnected from this side. There will come a day when we will see the other side of the tapestry, which will display the beautiful and intricate designs God has been weaving throughout our lives.

As you prepare your hearts for worship this week, take a few moments to write down some times in your life where you have seen God’s hand at work. If you gave yourself a name today, what would it be? Where does your life need redeeming right now? Spend time praying for yourself and others who need to draw closer to our Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

May God’s peace be with you,  
Pastor Carolyn