

OUT OF OBSCURITY

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When you were a kid, did you worry about being picked last for a team? When you were in high school, did you avoid team sports for fear of not making the team, or sitting out the season on the bench? Now that you're older, do you worry about getting passed over for a promotion? Do you ever think about what your life is worth, or fear it is too late to accomplish your dream? Have you concluded that you just need to be satisfied with your lot in life?

The Christmas Star

Do you know the story of the Christmas Star? Wise men from the Far East first discovered the star—a star of night that traveled westward like all stars but at a different pace. It did not appear to orbit the earth but to traverse it. Somehow, they learned that this most unusual star signaled a most unusual birth, and they followed it to the destination of the birthplace of the King of the Jews.

The Jewish people had a long and varied history, including periods of peace and prosperity, but generally of dispersal and discontent and servitude. One might wonder why these ancient sages would even take notice of a king of such an inconspicuous people—a people presently subject to the mighty arm of Roman domination. That very question discloses the answer to the mystery. You see, it was not the people at all, but the King Himself who was special. The Hebrew nation was simply the vehicle for His arrival—uniquely chosen and loved and prepared by God for that very purpose. The people had not risen to a new height of power or prestige, but into the midst of their *obscurity* was born One who would rule over all kings and kingdoms for all time and eternity.

That's why they came! That's why they traveled for so many months, enduring such hardship, exposing themselves to the dangers of the road—inclement weather, drought, and bandits.

Traveling by Braille

They didn't even know where they were to go, only to follow as the star led them. Evidently, this was an inconsistent marker, disappearing for unknown periods of time, later reappearing so they could resume their journey. They came to the city of Jerusalem, the capital of the Jewish people, but they didn't know where to go next. Their inquiry revealed an ancient prophecy that directed them five miles to the south, to the village of Bethlehem.

Micah 5 (NLT)

² *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah,*

are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past.

So Small

Beit-Lechem (House of Bread) lies in the shadow of the great city of Jerusalem. It was so small that it was not even mentioned (Joshua 15 and Nehemiah 11) among the lists of the towns where Judah's clans lived. Originally a community of sheep farmers, it was only notable as the home of Naomi, and thereby of Ruth, whose descendant was David, who became Israel's great king.

Just a small village in Micah's day—seemingly insignificant in its embryonic state. We may see the seed within a fruit, but it is the unique greatness of God our Creator that He recognizes the fruit within a seed! You just cannot tell the value of a book by its cover.

What's more, God loves to take what the world esteems as insignificant—especially *those people* whom others deem insignificant—and turn them into a surprising force for God's goodness!

“Just look at yourselves, brothers,” Paul wrote to the church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 1:26-29; CJB). *“Look at those whom God has called! Not many of you are wise by the world's standards, not many wield power or boast noble birth. But God chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise; God chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the strong; and God chose what the world looks down on as common or regards as nothing in order to bring to nothing what the world considers important; so that no one should boast before God.”*

Not only was Bethlehem a seemingly insignificant village, but David, who became the Hebrew people's greatest king, was a seemingly insignificant boy. The seventh son of Jesse, he was a shepherd. He was not even a soldier, like his brothers. Just a lowly keeper of sheep. To his own brothers he was of no account, but to serve their needs.

No one could have been prepared for the day when David, armed only with a leather sling and a handful of smooth stones, confronted that giant-of-a-man, Goliath, the leading warrior of the Philistine army. No one else dared to fight him, but David could not ignore him or his taunts of the people of God. You probably know the story: David defeated the giant with a single shot from his sling and beheaded the fallen colossus with his own great sword.

Ordinary people can do extraordinary things, when they give God control.

Mary was another such person. Just one among many in the lineage of David, but with a precious heart. When God interrupted her life with the mixed news that she would become pregnant and bear a son, though she was an unwed virgin—she listened and accepted His plan.

Her fiancé, Joseph, had a similar heart. When he learned the news, he accepted the new direction with faith and grace. Together, they weathered the next nine months and made the long journey from their hometown of Nazareth in the north to the village of Bethlehem in order to comply with the Roman law of census and taxation.

Just ordinary people from another seemingly insignificant town in the hill country on an extraordinary journey!

Ordinary is Good

Micah 5 (NLT)

² *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past.*

Whenever God chose His own leaders for His people, as with the patriarch Abram, or during the period of the judges (see the Book of Judges), or with Jesus' select apostles (see the Gospel accounts), He chose ordinary people and lifted them from obscurity to usefulness.

The greatest Ruler of Israel (and the world) would come from a seemingly insignificant village. He did not arrive with fanfare, but in the womb of His young mother. Finding no rooms available, His parents

had but one choice: to bed down for the night—that glorious night!—in an ordinary stable, with a feeding trough for a crib. This was His welcome into our world.

The Creator's Creation

But it was not the first that He knew of our world. His origin preceded this world's creation. In fact, He was its Creator. John referred to Him as “the Word”—that word which God spoke to make the world appear out of nothing.

John 1 (NLT)

¹ *In the beginning the Word already existed.*

*The Word was with God,
and the Word was God.*

² *He existed in the beginning with God.*

³ *God created everything through him,
and nothing was created except through him.*

⁴ *The Word gave life to everything that was created,
and his life brought light to everyone.*

⁵ *The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness can never extinguish it.*

¹⁴ *So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.*

Everything that God created, from the beginning, has come out of insignificance into meaningfulness. Do you see it? This pattern? This is God's way.

Elsewhere (Colossians 1:17; NLT), Paul also wrote: *“He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.”*

In his letter to the church in Philippi (Philippians 2:6-11; NLT), Paul reflected on Jesus' arrival in obscurity and His subsequent ascent to glory. He wrote: *“Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

Obscurity to glory! Insignificance to fulfilled purpose!

A Little Remnant

God's people are sometimes referred to in Scripture as a “remnant”—the tattered remains of a once great people. But this is more than a descriptive term; it is a term of endearment—a remnant handled and preserved like a precious scrap of what once was loved and what could again become momentous in God's hands.

Do not be anxious needlessly, for this is what Jesus has said (Luke 12:32; CJB): *“Have no fear, little flock, for your Father has resolved to give you the Kingdom!”*

God has “resolved”—made up His mind, purposed with determination—to give you His Kingdom! To see that you enter into all that He has prepared for you. To insure that His covenant blessings shall be yours and the evidence of His love will follow you all the days of your life.

You may be small, seemingly insignificant, and unknown, but God is saying, “I can still do great things through you! As you follow me, you will honor me and I will be pleased with the offering of your life.”

Offer Your Gifts

And when the wise men left Jerusalem on the road to Bethlehem, the star they had been chasing reappeared and they rejoiced to see it! It led them precisely to the home of Joseph, Mary, and their son, Jesus. Overcome with emotion at the success of their quest, they bowed in worship before the young boy, offering the gifts they had brought—gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Imagine their wonder, their thrill! Imagine the wonder of Jesus’ parents at such displays of devotion!

And wonder yourself at the miracle! Be amazed! God came down to earth—not to observe, but to involve Himself—to take part as One among us, Emmanuel (God-With-Us). To reveal Himself—His love, His grace, His patience, and the kind of power that could relieve all our fears, remove all our sins, and turn us into a people of righteousness and love.

Into our inconspicuousness, into our undeservingness, into our frail and faltering lives came Greatness, Worthiness, Strength, Steadfastness, Holiness, and Eternal Life. His name is Jesus, the Christ, the Messiah, the Everlasting Lord.

Let Him bring you, too, out of darkness into His marvelous light. He will create in you something new, something alive, something meaningful.

Decide today that you will not simply observe Him, or admire Him from a distance, but that you will involve yourself with Him and with His family, that you will give yourself to Him, that you will present to Him the gold, frankincense, and myrrh of your life. This is your reasonable act of worship.