To say Christmas is big is a big understatement. Christmas is huge! How huge? Not as huge as Thanksgiving when it comes to air and road travelers. Not as many dinner and dancing reservations as New Years’ Eve, but overall Christmas is bigger than any other day.

It is a multi-billion dollar bonanza for the retail sector. The next closest day is Halloween, but it is a distant second. Christmas is overload time for the post office and package carriers like UPS. There is not another day of the year into which more people put more time and effort than Christmas. Christmas is big decorations and big light displays - the biggest. No doubt about it - Christmas is big. We all tend to think of it that way, and that makes Micah's words good words for us to hear this day, because they tell us Christmas is actually little.

Just look at Bethlehem. It was not much of a place. Both population and otherwise, it was a small community, and it had no illusions of grandeur. Its only claim to fame was that one of her sons, a shepherd boy by the name of David, had gone on to become one of the greatest kings of Israel. But that had happened hundreds of years before Micah, and about a thousand years before Christmas. Bethlehem now lived in the shadow of nearby Jerusalem.

Of all the cities in all of Israel - a quiet little town, not a lot bigger than its name, where no big news story had broken for centuries – that is where God chose to have Christmas take place. Go figure!

Also figure this: the people who were in the first Christmas. There was Mary, of course. In the Magnificat, Mary described herself with words like servant and humble state. In today's sociological terms, she was lower class.

Joseph, her husband, had some royal blood. Luke 2 says he belonged to the family and line of David, but if you wanted to find Joseph, you did not look around in or near the palace courts in Jerusalem. You found him in a little town called Nazareth at a carpenter's bench, which means Joseph had some skills, but he was a blue collar worker.

So were the only other human beings who figured into the first Christmas. They were not big movers and shakers. They were not even middle-class management. They were shepherds. They were people who provided day care to sheep and babysat them at night!

Of all the people in all of Israel, God chose to have Christmas come through and to people who were little - people who were no-name nobodies. Again we say: Go figure!

Some have. Some have figured God chose to have Christmas play with a cast of lower-class people at a little wide-spot in the road because it would help make clear just how much his Son was humbling himself in coming from heaven to earth. Or you might figure it this way, that it was an indication of how Mary's Son would, for the most part, conduct his ministry - away from the glamour of the big city and out of the glare of the public spotlight, out with ordinary people.

Maybe so. God alone knows, and some day he will let us see exactly what he was thinking. But what do we see when we look at Bethlehem before and on the first Christmas - when we look at the community and the people.

We see Christmas was little. In fact, it was so little that it came into town, played, and hardly anyone noticed or caught it. Take note of that!

Regardless of what you hear and see; regardless of what family tradition may tell
you, things do not have to be big and glamorous for it to be Christmas. The house does not have to be immaculately decorated and spotlessly clean, the air filled with the smell of great baking and gourmet cooking.

If that were so, God would have told us and commanded it. Yes, if that were so, God would have made the first Christmas that way.

And yet, while the trappings of that first Christmas were small, the meaning of that first Christmas was huge. Micah said that out of that tiny little manger in the tiny little town of Bethlehem, that tiny little baby would become ruler over Israel. Within his kingdom people would live securely. And his greatness would reach to the ends of the earth. In fact, his origins are from of old, from ancient times. Add this all up and what do you get? You get the answer to the question: What Child is this? This child is the promised Savior of the nations. This child is none other than God himself. And that is anything but small. That is big. That is huge!

How huge? Huge enough to save sinners for heaven, huge enough to calm fears, to warm and comfort hearts, to revive and fortify hopes, to lift spirits and make them sing here on earth.

How does your schedule look for the next 36 hours? I am glad that you have chosen to make time time on it tonight for you and your household to look in Bethlehem, at the boy-child born there the first Christmas. I hope there is also time on your schedule for doing that on Christmas morning.

Sad to say, that is not anywhere on the Christmas schedules of many people. Even more sad is the fact that looking in Bethlehem is not on many Christian people's Christmas schedules; or, if it is there, it is there just once, and that is unfortunately little.

Christmas was not meant to be little that way. The fact is that there will not be anything bigger happening over the next 36 hours than the birth of your Savior.

So come to Bethlehem and see. Hear the Christmas angel, the great glad tidings tell. It is a small thing, but it will be great - for you, your soul, and your house! Amen.

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