

21 December 2003
Advent 4

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“Too Little?”

Text: Micah 5:1-5; Hebrews 10:5-10; Luke 1:39-55

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

“You’re too little.” Those are among the most frustrating and disappointing words to hear if you’re a child. “You’re too little.” Because there is so much that you want to do! So much that you want to try! So much that looks within your grasp, that looks so easy, that looks like you can do it . . . until one of the “giants” that walks the earth comes along and says, “No. You’re too little.”

We don’t want to hear it! Even when we get older – as a teenager, or as an adult – we still don’t want to hear those words. And we can be “too little” in all kinds of ways, you know. We can be too little physically: to climb ladders, to play football, to drive, to stay home alone. We can be too little mentally: to get into that top notch college, or get the promotion we wanted at work. And we can be too little financially: to buy the house, or the car, or the vacation we really wanted. . . . “You’re too little” is not what we want to hear. Its not good news. There is something you want that you cannot do, cannot get, cannot have.

Though sometimes we rebel against those words . . . and so children fall off ladders and get hurt; we get rejection letters from those colleges; we overspend and have trouble getting out from under our debt.

“You’re too little.” Oh, how we long for the day when we’re not too little anymore!

But there is another “too little” that I haven’t mentioned yet. And it is the most serious one. All the other “too littles” we can perhaps do something about; we can perhaps grow into later in life; we can perhaps overcome. But not this one. Because we are also by nature too little spiritually. That was the gist, really, of the Epistle from the book of Hebrews that we heard earlier. That all that we can do, all the sacrifices, all the offerings, all are too little. ***“You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings.”*** First of all, that was true for the people of the Old Testament. They had the Tabernacle and the Temple, and these

sacrifices and offerings were of lambs and goats and bulls and grain and wine . . . and how much had been sacrificed and offered over the years? How many *millions* of animals? *But it was all too little.* God could not be satisfied with these sacrifices and offerings. They had to keep doing them. They could never do them enough. And though God accepted them in His mercy, according to His promise when offered in faith by His people, they were not sufficient to pay for sin.

But that's not only true of the people of the Old Testament, but also for you and I. We may no longer sacrifice and offer lambs and goats and bulls and grain and wine anymore, but what *are* the sacrifices and offerings that we make? What are the things we do to punish ourselves, that we think might pay for our sin? What sacrifices and offerings of time, or money, or effort, or prayer, or dedication, or service, or good works, or love? Over all your years, how much? *And yet it is all too little.* Too little to pay for even a single sin. Too little to make you good enough. Too, too little.

And don't we long for the day when we're not too little anymore!

Well that's the good news that we heard in the other readings for this evening, from the prophet Micah, and from St. Luke. That as we approach Christmas, we may know that in the birth of the Son of God, the big became little, that we who are little might not be too little anymore.

And so we heard in the First Reading from the prophet Micah, ***“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah.”*** You're too little. It was true. Bethlehem wasn't a big important city like Jerusalem. It wasn't a big important seaport. It wasn't a big important fortified city for the protection of the nation. It was just Bethlehem. Little Bethlehem. Harmless Bethlehem. “Always destined to play second fiddle to Jerusalem” Bethlehem. . . . Until God through the prophet Micah said, ***“You who are ‘too little?’ From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days.”*** No Jerusalem, you do not get to host the birth of the Saviour of the world! That honor is given to Bethlehem, which although it was too little for men, was not too little for God.

Then we heard in the Holy Gospel of when Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth, and there's “you're too littles” all over the place here! First there was **Elizabeth** who, although she was old and a full grown adult was, in a sense, “too little.” She was *physically* somehow too little to have children because she was barren. And yet God chose her for the honor of bearing the last and greatest Old Testament prophet, John the Baptist. She was not too little for God. . . . And then, of course, there was **Mary**, who was “too little” in every sense of the word! Too little to have been married yet. Too little to bear children yet. Of

too little significance to be chosen to be *the mother of God!* Yet she was chosen for the honor of bearing the Son of God in human flesh and the ushering in of the New Testament! In God's eyes she was not too little. . . . And then don't overlook little **John**, who doesn't even wait until he's out of the womb to begin his prophetic ministry, but leaps for joy when Mary and the pre-born Jesus come to visit. And so while the world tells us that babies in the womb are "too little" to matter, and that even babies outside the womb are "too little" to have faith – we know that's simply not true. Even these are not "too little" for God.

And so it is for us who are too little, that Christmas means so much! For the Son of God came to us who were too little. Too little in size, too little in age, too little in ability, too little in faith, too little to matter. And He became little, just a baby in a manger – but He was not too little. For even in the womb, even in the manger, even as a young boy, even being baptized, even being ridiculed and made fun of, even being beaten and whipped, even hanging on the cross, He was the almighty, all-present, all-knowing God, come to do for us what we are too little to do. And so by His one sacrifice, His one offering, He did pay for the sin of the world. All the sin, not just some of it. For all people, not just some of them. And for all time. And so as the writer to the Hebrews wrote, "***we have been sanctified*** [made holy] ***through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.***"

Or in other words, in Christ, we are no longer too little. No matter how little we are, we are no longer too little. Like Bethlehem and Elizabeth and Mary and John, you have been chosen by God. You have been chosen to be His son or daughter. Chosen and given the gift of faith and forgiveness. And by faith in Christ, all that is His is yours. His merits are yours. His sacrifice is yours. His offering is yours. His holiness is yours. His perfection is yours. His kingdom is yours. All that you, by nature, are too little to do or have, is given to you and is yours in Christ.

And our children gave us a wonderful demonstration of that again this evening . . . even with all the tears and problems! (Children's Christmas program before the Divine Service.) Are they too little for Christ? Too little to believe? Too little to be sinners? Too little to know the love and forgiveness of their Saviour. No way! They are a picture of us. For we are no different. We are children too, of our Heavenly Father. And as He has chosen and called us all by His Word, and made us His children through Holy Baptism, He now calls us to His Table, to receive Him and all that He has for us. Your sin is not too great, nor your faith too little. And as we wonder this week at our Saviour's coming, wrapped in a virgin, then wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in the manger, so too we wonder at His coming now, wrapped in bread and wine. But it is the same Saviour, and the same blessing He comes to give.

And so the words of Mary are true for us: ***“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant . . . for He who is mighty has done great things for me.”*** Oh, come, let us adore Him!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.