

Christmas Carols
O Little Town of Bethlehem
Micah 5:1-2

December 12, 2021

HDBC

Songs play an important role during Christmas season. Begins with the traditional carols of the season, includes fun songs for kids and new expressions added to the celebration. But it's not always easy to catch the lyrics of the songs we love. Sometimes we just sing it wrong, especially as kids. Here are some examples. **Christmas Songs with confusing lyrics:**

Deck the Halls with Buddy Holly

On the first day of Christmas my tulip gave to me

Later on we'll perspire, as we dream by the fire.

He's makin' a list, chicken and rice.

Noel. Noel, Barney's the king of Israel.

Olive, the other reindeer.

Sleep in heavenly peas

You'll go down in Listerine

O Come, froggy faithful

This morning we're starting a three week series, looking at the Biblical foundations for a few of the Christmas carols that we have come to love. Today, a carol written by Phillip Brooks, initially for children. He wrote it after making a pilgrimage to Bethlehem in 1865 and going out into the shepherd's field at night.

Many OT references to the coming Messiah. But it is in **the prophetic books** that we learn the most about Jesus. Isaiah reveals the most: Born of a virgin. Descendent of David. Suffering Servant.

But it was **little known Micah** who reveals to us the place of the Messiah's birth. He tells us that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem.

This was a small town situated about six miles from Jerusalem in the midst of a fertile area filled with olive trees, grapevines, and wheat. Micah tells us three things about this city, and Matthew adds a fourth. **Read Micah 5:1-2**

1. Besieged

Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah and prophesied during the tragic days when Assyria conquered Samaria, took the ten northern tribes into captivity (722 B.C.), occupied Judah and besieged the holy city, Jerusalem. That siege would have included the town of Bethlehem, which was only a few miles from Jerusalem. Verse 5:1 highlights the hopelessness of the situation. In Micah's day it was a city that was staring at a difficult future.

Even today Bethlehem is a city that is somewhat besieged. When I first went there in 1996 we could go in and out freely. Next time there was a 20 foot wall around the city. Still there today. Sad then and sad today. Residents are not allowed to come and go freely.

2. Chosen

In 5:2, God speaks, of the insignificance of Bethlehem. ***Too little to be among the clans.*** In contrast with Jerusalem, Samaria and other cities, Bethlehem was nothing. It was scarcely worth counting among the clans of Judah, yet God chose to bring the Messiah out of this town. Why?

Messiah is of the lineage of David and David was from Bethlehem. That's true, but it misses the point of verse two. **The point is that Bethlehem is small.** God chose something small, quiet, out of the way, and does something there that changes the course of history and eternity. **Why?**

Because when he acts this way we can't boast in the merits of men (or cities), but only in the wisdom and mercy of God. We can't say, "Well, of course he set his favor on Bethlehem, look at what Bethlehem has achieved!" All we can say is, ***God is not impressed by our bigness; He does nothing in order to attract attention to our accomplishments; he does everything to magnify his glory and mercy.***

When God chose a replacement for king Saul, he sent Samuel to the little town of Bethlehem. When he looked over the sons of Jesse, he set his favor on the youngest not the oldest. When God chose a man to defeat giant Goliath it was the young shepherd, David. When he chose a weapon, it was a slingshot.

Why does God do his great work through little towns and youngest sons and slingshots and mangers and mustard seeds? David tells us in 1 Samuel 17:45-47, just before he slays the giant. He says to Goliath,

I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all the assembly may know that the Lord saves not with the sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give you into our hand.

God uses little towns and youngest sons and slingshots to show that he is not the least dependent on human skill or greatness or achievement.

God chose a stable so no inn-keeper might boast, "He chose my inn!"

God chose a manger so that no wood worker could boast, "He chose the craftsmanship of my bed!"

He chose Bethlehem so no one could boast, *the greatness of our city led Him to choose this place.*

And this besieged, chosen city became the birthplace of the Savior. And as a result it was a changed city.

3. **Changed**

God reached down into human affairs as He had done so many times before and **led a pagan ruler** to set in motion a chain of events that would lead the parents of Jesus to leave the security of Nazareth and make the trek to Bethlehem at just the right time for Micah's prophecy to be fulfilled.

Unable to find regular accommodations for the night it appears they were allowed to sleep a barn or cave. At least that is the tradition. Let's be careful to note that the Bible does not offer details. We know they did not stay in the place they wanted to stay. We know that she used a feeding trough as a place to lay the baby. Everything else is speculation, based on those few facts that we know. Regardless of the actual details, it is clear that the Savior was born in humble circumstances.

We don't know how long they were there before the baby was born. But, at the right time, in those crude, humble surroundings, the savior was born. Bethlehem, *the house of bread*, was now housing the newborn **bread of life**. At that moment Bethlehem was changed. It was a change that sent shock waves throughout the world. It was hardly noticed at the time, but in time, it would rock the world. It is often true that events that history would later record as significant, are hardly noticed when they happen.

On a cold February morning in 1809, two travelers met on one of the roads of Hardin County, Kentucky. "Any news down in the village, Ezry?" asked the first man. Ezry replied, "Well, Squire McLean's gone to Washington to see Madison swore in and old Spellman tells me this Bonaparte fella has captured most of Spain."

Then came Ezry's question. "What's the news out here, neighbor?" "Nothing at all, except for a new baby down at Tom Lincoln's. Nothing ever happens out here!"

"Nothing ever happens out here!" What a statement. Abraham Lincoln had just been born, and the world hardly noticed. It would take the world 50 years to feel the shock waves of that birth; a birth that would change history.

In a similar way, the birth of Jesus was hardly noticed. Apart from a group of shepherds who received angelic invitations to visit the baby, no one noticed. But the little town of Bethlehem was changed. It would never be the same. Notice the change in Matthew's paraphrase of Micah's prophecy. *And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah, are by no means least among the leaders of Judah; for out of you shall come forth a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.* Matt 2:6

Do you see the change? Micah declares the insignificance of Bethlehem. Matthew declares its importance! What made the difference? **The entrance of Jesus**. May I suggest to you that *the presence of Jesus in a person's life does a similar thing*. I'm not saying that you are insignificant without Christ. That is certainly not true. But when Christ is invited into a person's life, it changes everything, in a positive way. You find meaning, purpose, joy in ways that you never could have without Christ. Why?

You were made to have a relationship with you God. That is only possible when Jesus is present in your life. Jesus, in your heart, changes everything. It certainly changed Bethlehem. It will change you!

Bethlehem would be changed in other ways, also. The birth of this baby would **bring both joy and suffering**. Within a couple of years this little town would experience the horror of having its babies destroyed by a jealous Herod. They would learn the meaning of deep suffering. Their suffering was a foreshadowing of the suffering of Christ.

A television interviewer was walking streets of Tokyo at Christmas time. Much as in America, Christmas shopping is a big commercial success in Japan. The interviewer stopped one young woman on the sidewalk, and asked, "What is the meaning of Christmas?" Laughing, she responded, "I don't know. Is that the day that Jesus died?" There was some truth in her answer.

But along with that suffering this town would experience great glory. History would remember this town as the birthplace of the Messiah. The place where deity and humanity could be seen in a human body. God with man! The songwriter said it well.

*O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, The silent stars go by;
Yet in thy dark streets shineth, The everlasting Light;
The hopes and fears of all the years, Are met in thee tonight.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem! Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sin and enter in, Be born in us to-day.
We hear the Christmas angels, The great glad tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel!*

Do you have Jesus, abiding in your heart . . . in your life? If not, ask Him in today. Like the little town of Bethlehem, you will be forever changed.

Invitation

SHOW VIDEO – WHITE ELEPHANT