



December 18, 2022 P. Isaiah Fern

The Songs, The Story O Little Town of Bethlehem

"Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, ²"Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him."

³King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. ⁴He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?"

⁵"In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote:

⁶'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah,
are not least among the ruling cities of Judah,
for a ruler will come from you
who will be the shepherd for my people Israel."

-Matthew 2:1-6

⁸That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹²And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger. ¹³Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

¹⁴"Glory to God in highest heaven,
and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

¹⁵When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. ¹⁷After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. ¹⁸All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, ¹⁹but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. ²⁰The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them."

-Luke 2:8-20

Jesus, the king of the universe, intentionally decided to be born and raised in a little town of less than 1,000 people called Bethlehem. **Christ was born humbly and quietly.** Why?

- The **God of the universe** would choose to relate to **ALL** people.
- He can relate to King in the palace, and he can relate to the homeless in the streets.
- He loved the world so much that he would sacrifice his rights and privileges willingly to relate to **AND** save them.

“At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. ²(This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.⁴ And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. ⁵He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

⁶And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.⁷ She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.⁸ That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. ⁹Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them. They were terrified, ¹⁰but the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. ¹¹The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! ¹²And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.”

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Luke 2:1-20

- There was a census being taken.
- Joseph and Mary traveled back to Bethlehem because he (Joseph) was of the lineage of David.
- The Virgin Mary gave birth to the Lord Jesus in a stable outside in the feeding trough (manger).
- Angels appeared to simple shepherds to sing and proclaim the Savior had come and they went to worship.
- Magi came from the East because they follow the star to where he was, and they brought gifts to worship.
- Herod spoke to the Magi and planned to kill Jesus, but they escaped to Egypt until Herod died and returned to Nazareth where Jesus was raised.

At this time, there were two cities of Bethlehem. South of Jerusalem (roughly 5 miles) was Bethlehem Ephrathah (where David was raised and Christ was born). North, near Nazareth, was Bethlehem of Zebulun.

In approximately 700 BC, the prophet Micah named the tiny village of Bethlehem as the birthplace of Israel's Messiah (Micah 5:2). The fulfillment of this prophecy as the birthplace of Christ is one of the most widely known and widely celebrated facts in history. **The probability of predicting Christ being born in Bethlehem = 1 in 10 to the 5th power or 100,000.** While most people predicting the future are VAGUE for fear of making a mistake and wanting to be right, Micah the prophet predicts the town and specifies which Bethlehem, doubling down on the inspiration that this prediction was from the Almighty God.

Q: The world was not paying attention to what was happening in Bethlehem, a town not worth noticing. How many times are we not paying attention to what He is doing? What lesser things are you getting distracted by?

The same God who created the earth at the beginning also had a detailed plan of salvation, which gives me confidence in His plan for the future.

Q: God had a detailed plan of salvation since before the world existed. He was planting seeds of His plan of salvation for 700 years before Jesus was ever born. He already had it all planned out. Knowing this, do you think He has your entire life planned out? Do you think anything in your life surprises Him or catches Him off guard? How do you feel knowing this is your reality?

History of the Hymn

Rev. Phillips Brooks was a 6'8" Harvard graduate and an Episcopal priest who eventually became bishop of Massachusetts. In August 1865, his church sent him away for a year. His travels took him through Europe, and in December, to the Holy Land. The itinerary included a horseback ride from Jerusalem to Bethlehem on Christmas Eve.

Something about the beauty and simplicity of that visit stayed with Rev. Brooks when he returned to America. Several years later, he wrote a poem to paint in words the sights and sounds of that little town of Bethlehem he had visited. It found its way into many hymnals around the world.

In contrast to some other Christmas hymns that emphasize the glory of God as seen in the grand chorus of angels, Brooks focuses on the quietness of Christ's birth, and how little the larger world paid attention. The final stanza is a prayer that Christ would come and be present with us.

God was planting seeds of salvation for *700 years* before Jesus was even born. He already had it all planned out. *Can you trust Him with your future?*

The Lord came in a quiet and peaceful night, while most of the world paid no attention.

Those who noticed:

- Wise Men/Magi
- Shepherds
- King Herod

Herod feared all threats to his rule. When the Magi came to him, he told them to report back so he might also go and worship Christ, yet secretly he planned to kill Jesus because he wanted to end any threat to his authority. Although the Jewish world was looking for the signs of his coming, the Magi & shepherds may have been the only ones who saw that night that he had come. Jesus entered the world **quietly**, but He will return with a **trumpet's sound!** Regardless of our life choices:

- Believer
- Unbeliever
- Living in sin
- Living in comfort

The Lord is returning!

This gives those of us who are awaiting the return of Christ **hope** for eternity. This also gives those of us with fear of death and searching for meaning in life an answer to our questions about "what happens next." It gives motivation Believers to be waiting in anticipation for the return of Christ to be good stewards of the time that we have with our family and those the Lord has placed on our hearts to bear witness to.

When Jesus returns, there will be no doubt of that day. The whole world will see, dead and living. Let us not be found unprepared and unaware.

We might not see God working, but He is doing things in His own perfect timing, in the most unlikely places, to accomplish His better plan.

"For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders;

And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace."

Isaiah 9:6

Q. How much does God love you that He would humble Himself so low to come here the way that He did and live the humble life that He lived? Considering this, what can Jesus relate to in your life that until now you hadn't thought of?

What do you need to see? What do you need to pay attention to? What is He doing that you may not have been aware of?

Have you ever felt like God wasn't working and then been surprised to see that He has? Is there an area in your life where you need to trust that He IS working? Think about the tough things the Lord has allowed and how He is going to use them for His purposes in His timing? Think about the small things in your life that the Lord is doing that you have been unaware of?

Take time to read the lyrics of this hymn and meditate on its meaning as well as how it relates to you, today. With the historical context, what have you seen about God that applies to you today? What truth can you thank Him for this Christmas season?

*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.*

*For Christ is born of Mary, and, gathered all
above
while mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of
wond'ring love.
O morning stars, together proclaim the
holy birth,
and praises sing to God the King and peace to
all the earth.*

*How silently, how silently, the wondrous
gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts the blessings
of his heav'n.
No ear may hear his coming, but in this
world of sin,
where meek souls will receive him, still the dear Christ
enters in.*

*O holy Child of Bethlehem, descend to us,
we pray,
cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us
today.
We hear the Christmas angels the great glad
tidings tell;
O come to us, abide with us,
our Lord Immanuel*