

Favorite Hymns of the Season

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Our Humble Savior was Born in a Little Town

Bible References: NAS 1995

Introduction: Dear friends: Our Advent Wednesdays are focusing on favorite hymns of the season:

- **12/3** – Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Emmanuel (TLH 62)
- **12/10** – Hark! the Herald Angels Sing (TLH 94)
- **Today** – O Little Town of Bethlehem (TLH 647)

There is an *interesting story* behind the hymn:¹

- Phillips Brooks, who wrote the words: He graduated from Harvard in 1855, then from the Episcopal Theological Seminary in 1859. In **1861** he was called to lead Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia. He hired Lewis Redner (*who would eventually compose the tune*) to be his organist and SS superintendent. Within a year, the church was full and 1,000 attended Sunday School.
- The Civil War was fought from 1861 to 1865: Approximately 700,000 Americans died, *almost twice as many as in WW2* (405,000). Many were depressed, *since almost everyone knew someone who had been killed or seriously injured*. Many women in church wore black *as they mourned a husband or a son*.

¹ Ace Collins, Stories Behind the Best-Loved Songs of Christmas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 141-142.

- Abraham Lincoln: The Civil War ended on **4/9/1865**; *Lincoln was assassinated 5 days later (4/14)*. Brooks, *though not his pastor*, officiated at Lincoln's funeral.
 - Sabbatical: Overwhelmed by the war and death, Brooks took a trip to the Middle East. On Christmas Eve he rode a horse 6 miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, *which was still small and remote*. He became *speechless* as he thought about the Son of God in flesh being born in those humble surroundings.
 - The hymn: Brooks struggled for three years to put his Bethlehem experience into words. Then, finally, in **1868**, he wrote the words and Redner composed the tune – ***one of the most beloved hymns in the world!***
1. **O little town of Bethlehem, How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, The silent stars
go by;** // Try to imagine Brooks on his horse ♦coming upon Bethlehem at dusk, ♦seeing the town falling asleep, and ♦seeing stars beginning to appear.

Bethlehem was so insignificant, yet the Holy Spirit moved Micah to write: **5:2** "...as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity." // *God always keeps His promises!*

**Yet in thy dark streets shineth, The everlasting light;
The hopes and fears of all the years, Are met in thee
tonight.** // As Brooks saw the little town, his mind fled back over 1800 years to Jesus' birth. After 4,000 years of waiting, the Messiah came, He is Emmanuel, **God with us to save us!**

2. **For Christ is born of Mary, And, gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep, Their watch of
wondering love.** // Mary was a young, unimportant,
Christian, virgin woman chosen by the Father to bear
His promised Son. Though our Savior's birth was
unnoticed by most, the holy angels *watched* and
marveled to see the fulfillment of God's promise.

Genesis 3:15 "...I will put enmity Between you
and the woman, And between your seed and her
seed; He shall bruise you on the head, And you
shall bruise him on the heel." // *Jesus is the
Promised Seed of the woman!*

**O morning stars, together, Proclaim the holy birth,
And praises sing to God, the King, And peace to all the
earth!** // In the presence of shepherds, a multitude of
angels – *morning stars* – said: **Luke 2:14** "Glory to God
in the highest, And on earth peace among men with
whom He is pleased." // Who are such people? Those
who, *by God's grace*, turn ▶from their sins ▶to trust in
the Babe of Bethlehem for eternal life!

3. **How silently, how silently, The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts, The blessings of his
heaven.** // Us entering heaven is **not** based on ▶our
goodness or ▶our choice. The Bible says, **1 Cor. 1:30**
"...by [**God's**] **doing** you are in Christ Jesus..."

**No ear may hear his coming; But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive him, still, The dear
Christ enters in.** // The proud and self-sufficient always
reject the Christ. **However**, for all who know they have
sinned and are helpless to save themselves, **God**
enables those meek souls to receive the dear Christ.

4. **O holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sin, and enter in, Be born in us today. // Are you a meek soul? Are you not yet saved? Stanza 4** could be your prayer: O holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to me, I pray; Cast out my sin, and enter in, Be born in me today. // The **holy Child of Bethlehem** is the GREATEST GIFT ANYONE CAN EVER RECEIVE!! If you have Him, **greatly rejoice!** If you know someone without Him, **share the good news with these brochures:** [Who Is God?](#) and [St. Nick or Jesus](#)

We hear the Christmas angels, The great glad tidings tell; Oh, come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Immanuel!

- ➔ Being saved through Jesus is **wonderful!**
- ➔ Jesus abiding with us **and** us abiding with Him is **critical!** Consider these passages from **Hebrews**:
 - **2:1** “...we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard [about Jesus], so that we do not drift away *from it*.”
 - **3:7-8** “Today if you hear [God’s] voice, do not harden your hearts...”
 - **3:12** “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.”

Let Us Pray: Dear LORD, TYSM for saving us and blessing us with the beautiful hymn, O Little Town of Bethlehem! Please
♦keep us abiding in Jesus and ♦help us to share Your saving truth with others!

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