

Why Bethlehem?

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!

Bethlehem today:

- Muslim, Jewish and Christian
- Crowded with people, tourists, police and military
- a place of constant TENSION
- The Church of the Nativity

READ Luke 2:1-20

WHY BETHLEHEM?

God does NOTHING without purpose and intention.

I. A Special Kind of Town

- A. Judea hillside
- B. 2700 feet above sea level (cooler than the desert below)
- C. **3 ½ miles from Jerusalem**
- D. A small town. GOD works through the humble means to prove His glory and might.
- E. The city of DAVID
 - 1. Luke 2:4
 - 2. Ruth 1:1-2
 - 3. Ruth 2:2-4
 - 4. Ruth 4:13-17
 - 5. 1 Samuel 16:1
- F. An important city to Jacob. Gen 35:16-19

II. A Special Kind of Shepherd. Luke 2:8

- A. The MISHA (commentary on the Law)
 - 1. *Sheep were to be KEPT in the WILDERNESS, NOT populated areas*
 - 2. *ONLY EXCEPTION = sheep designated for TEMPLE SACRIFICE.*
- B. These were PRIESTLY SHEPHERDS - (Edersheim, 1885)
- C. CARED for the lambs.
- D. Kept them unblemished
- E. DELIVERED THEM to the TEMPLE. 3 ½ miles away.

III. **A Special Kind of Announcement. Luke 2:11-12**

- A. "Christ" (yeshua, a MAN)
- B. "The LORD" (YHWH, GOD)

- C. "You will find the baby wrapped in clothes" (KJV = "swaddling clothes")

- D. Luke 12:16 "*They hurried off and found Mary and Joseph....*" HOW did they know where to go?

IV. **A Special Kind of BIRTH.**

- A. As PRIESTLY SHEPHERDS, they knew that Messiah would be born in BETHLEHEM. **Micah 5:2**

- B. The ANGEL of the Lord gave them a SIGN...
 - 1. Migdal Edar, "The Tower of the Flock."
 - 2. Shepherd's towers were common in Israel
 - 3. BUT this Shepherd's Tower was on the ROAD to JERUSALEM, near Rachel's Tomb.
 - 4. This was the Shepherd's Tower where the TEMPLE SACRIFICES would be watched

 - 5. The GROUND LEVEL of the tower, was where the shepherds would take the sheep to birth their NEW LAMBS.

 - 6. The Lambs would be wrapped in cloths, to protect them from harming themselves, so that they would be **UNBLEMISHED** and **PURE for their role as a LAMB of SACRIFICE.**

 - 7. The newborn lambs would be WRAPPED, and LAID in a MANGER until they were calm.

 - 8. The SHEPHERDS knew EXACTLY where to find the newborn baby!

V. **A SPECIAL KIND of SAVIOR.**

- A. **The God-man**
- B. **Born as a sacrifice** (Hebrews 2:17) "*For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.*"

- C. **Coming Again.**
 - 1. Only 2 passages mention *Migdal Edar*.

- a. Gen 35:19-21
- b. Micah 4:2-8

- 2. (Hebrews 9:27-28) *"Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."*

It was **Christmas Eve, 1865**. Phillip Brooks, the prominent Philadelphia clergyman, stood overlooking the fields of Bethlehem, hoping that the scene would bring peace back to his troubled heart. He was a discouraged and broken man. At **30 years of age**, he had seen enough sadness to last a lifetime. Brooks was the pastor of Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia. His dynamic preaching and love for people helped the church grow from a small congregation to one of the most influential churches in America. At the same time that his fame grew, his spirit suffered from the strain of ministering to so many hurting souls. The following quote describes the burden the young pastor carried in his heart:

*"Brooks was growing **physically and spiritually tired**. By 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, the national spirit was dying almost as quickly as the soldiers on the battlefields. **Everyone knew someone who had been killed or gravely injured in the conflict**. Scores of women in the church wore black as they mourned the loss of a husband or son. While the preacher tried to fight it, **darkness fell over every facet of the services**. Brooks was severely taxed each time he stood in front of his congregation. They wanted him to be inspirational, to believe that the good things in life they had once known would someday be theirs again. They wanted an end to the war. **Yet even though he made a valiant effort, the preacher couldn't give his flock what they needed most: peace**"*

Collins, "Best Loved Songs of Christmas," 142).

Brooks and the rest of the war weary nation rejoiced when the **war ended on April 9, 1865**. But the joyful mood lasted **only five days**, as word spread that **President Lincoln had been assassinated**. Once again, Brooks was called on to minister to a grieving congregation. He preached one of the most memorable sermons regarding President Lincoln in a **eulogy delivered to the Philadelphia congregation on April 23, 1865**.

The grief of the President's assassination brought Brooks to the end of his strength. He requested a **sabbatical leave** and traveled to the Holy Land, where he **hoped to find peace** for his troubled soul. After several months of rest, he still struggled with hopelessness. **On Christmas Eve, he borrowed a horse** and traveled from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. He arrived just as dusk settled over the

fields where shepherds were tending their sheep, just as they did on the night Jesus was born. Peace overwhelmed pastor Brooks as he recalled the words of Luke 2:14: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men - on whom his favor rests.”

The Bethlehem experience changed the young Phillip Brooks. He returned home renewed and prepared to minister to others once again. Although deeply touched, he was **never able to fully express** what happened to him that night in Bethlehem. **Three years** after his visit to Bethlehem, he was preparing for the Christmas Eve service at his church. He began to recall the feeling of peace that swept over him that calm night on a Judean hillside. He had never been able to express what happened to him in Bethlehem, but now **words were flowing from his pen** as he prepared the Christmas Eve service. He began to write the words to a song.