

O Little Town Of Bethlehem

Phillips Brooks

Lewis H. Redner



O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, how still we see thee
For Christ is born of Ma - ry, and gath - ered all a -
How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly the won - drous gift is
O ho - ly child of Beth - le - hem, de - scend to us, we



lie. A - bove thy deep and dream - less sleep the
bove, while mor - tals sleep, the an - gels keep their
giv'n. So God im - parts to hu - man hearts the
pray. Cast out our sin and en - ter in, be



si - lent stars go by, yet in thy dark streets
watch of won - d'ring love. O morn - ing stars, to -
bles - sings of His Heav'n. No ear may hear His
born in us to - day. We hear the Christ - mas



shi - neth the ev - er - last - ing light; the hopes and fears of
geth - er pro - claim the ho - ly birth! And prais - es sing to
com - ing, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will re -
an - gels the great glad ti - dings tell, O come to us, a -



all the years are me in thee to - night.
God the King, and peace to men on earth.
cieve him still, the dear Christ en - ters in.
bide with us, our Lord Em - man - u - el.

O Little Town of Bethlehem began with a visit to —you guessed it—Bethlehem. New England pastor Phillips Brooks visited there on horseback on Christmas Eve during a year-long sabbatical. He went to see where locals said “the shepherds saw the star” and was annoyed by the biblical inaccuracy (Luke 2:8-14). But as he rode through the fields, he was struck that somewhere near Ruth and Boaz had met, David had been born, and shepherds really saw angels announcing the Messiah’s birth.

Still struck by that trip two years later, Brooks wrote a poem for children at his church to sing on Christmas Eve, 1868. He asked the organist, Lewis Redner, to write the music. Redner remembered going to bed the night before rehearsal discouraged and fruitless (but content he was at least ready to teach the next morning). In the middle of the night, he woke up with an idea and finished the tune that Sunday morning. Perhaps with his lesson in mind, he also advised Brooks to change a line so as not to confuse the children with a wrongful view about Mary being morally perfect, as only Christ is. Though not his intention, Brooks respectfully changed it, then later cut the verse altogether.

Notice how his poem carries the biblical theme of incarnation. Bethlehem was “little,” yet chosen for glory, whose dark streets became the birthplace of God the Son. After considering this in the first two verses, Brooks moves in the second two to carry the analogy to us. It ends with a prayer asking for that same Light from Bethlehem to shine in our dark hearts and be born in us.

The verse Brooks eventually cut carries this same theme. Thankfully, it was still recorded and added to later publications, and it’s worth remembering here:

*Where children pure and happy pray to the Blessed Child,
Where misery cries out to Thee, Son of the undefiled [or mother mild];
Where Charity stands watching, and Faith holds wide the door,
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks, & Christmas comes once more.*

Scripture to consider:

- | | | |
|------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 2 Samuel 7 | Micah 5:1-5 | John 3:1-21 |
| Isaiah 11 | Matthew 1:18-2:23 | Colossians 1:15-23 |
| Isaiah 53 | Luke 2:1-20 | |

O Little Town Of Bethlehem

Phillips Brooks

Lewis H. Redner



O lit - tle town of Beth - le - hem, how still we see thee
For Christ is born of Ma - ry, and gath - ered all a -
How si - lent - ly, how si - lent - ly the won - drous gift is
O ho - ly child of Beth - le - hem, de - scend to us, we



lie. A - bove thy deep and dream - less sleep the
bove, while mor - tals sleep, the an - gels keep their
giv'n. So God im - parts to hu - man hearts the
pray. Cast out our sin and en - ter in, be



si - lent stars go by, yet in thy dark streets
watch of won - d'ring love. O morn - ing stars, to -
bles - sings of His Heav'n. No ear may hear His
born in us to - day. We hear the Christ - mas



shi - neth the ev - er - last - ing light; the hopes and fears of
geth - er pro - claim the ho - ly birth! And prais - es sing to
com - ing, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will re -
an - gels the great glad ti - dings tell, O come to us, a -



all the years are me in thee to - night.
God the King, and peace to men on earth.
cieve him still, the dear Christ en - ters in.
bide with us, our Lord Em - man - u - el.

O Little Town of Bethlehem began with a visit to —you guessed it—Bethlehem. New England pastor Phillips Brooks visited there on horseback on Christmas Eve during a year-long sabbatical. He went to see where locals said “the shepherds saw the star” and was annoyed by the biblical inaccuracy (Luke 2:8-14). But as he rode through the fields, he was struck that somewhere near Ruth and Boaz had met, David had been born, and shepherds really saw angels announcing the Messiah’s birth.

Still struck by that trip two years later, Brooks wrote a poem for children at his church to sing on Christmas Eve, 1868. He asked the organist, Lewis Redner, to write the music. Redner remembered going to bed the night before rehearsal discouraged and fruitless (but content he was at least ready to teach the next morning). In the middle of the night, he woke up with an idea and finished the tune that Sunday morning. Perhaps with his lesson in mind, he also advised Brooks to change a line so as not to confuse the children with a wrongful view about Mary being morally perfect, as only Christ is. Though not his intention, Brooks respectfully changed it, then later cut the verse altogether.

Notice how his poem carries the biblical theme of incarnation. Bethlehem was “little,” yet chosen for glory, whose dark streets became the birthplace of God the Son. After considering this in the first two verses, Brooks moves in the second two to carry the analogy to us. It ends with a prayer asking for that same Light from Bethlehem to shine in our dark hearts and be born in us.

The verse Brooks eventually cut carries this same theme. Thankfully, it was still recorded and added to later publications, and it’s worth remembering here:

*Where children pure and happy pray to the Blessed Child,
Where misery cries out to Thee, Son of the undefiled [or mother mild];
Where Charity stands watching, and Faith holds wide the door,
The dark night wakes, the glory breaks, & Christmas comes once more.*

Scripture to consider:

- | | | |
|------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 2 Samuel 7 | Micah 5:1-5 | John 3:1-21 |
| Isaiah 11 | Matthew 1:18-2:23 | Colossians 1:15-23 |
| Isaiah 53 | Luke 2:1-20 | |