

Bethlehem Morning

Micah 5:2

Phillips Brooks was burned out. He was known as the most dynamic and inspirational preacher of his time, but he had lost his fervor and could not seem to recover. In his mid twenties he had become pastor of the Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia. He recruited a super salesman named Lewis Redner to be his Sunday School Superintendent and organist. The church exploded in growth. They began with 30 children and within a year there were 1000. The next two years the numbers increased, partly because of Brooks' dynamic preaching, partly because of Redner's music.

But then the Civil War came and the mood in the church became somber. The national spirit was dying, women were wearing black due to a husband or son killed in battle, and darkness fell over every facet of the worship services. Brooks tried to be inspirational and encourage his church but it was draining him. When the war ended he thought the vitality and joy would return immediately but it did not.

Abraham Lincoln was assassinated and the pain intensified. Phillips Brooks was not the President's pastor, but because he was such a great orator, he was asked to preach the President's funeral. He reached down deep and found the appropriate words to say for the moment but later he was so burned out that he could not rekindle his own spiritual flame. So he asked the church for a sabbatical and took a trip to the Holy Land.

On Christmas Eve in Jerusalem, he mounted a horse and went off riding. At dusk, when the first stars were out, he rode into the tiny village of Bethlehem. The town had changed little since the birth of Christ. It lifted Brooks spirits to be with a few feet of the very spot where Jesus was born. There was singing in the church of the Nativity and he felt surrounded by the Spirit of God.

Brooks wrote about his horseback journey from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, where he assisted with the midnight service on Christmas Eve, 1865: "I remember standing in the old church in Bethlehem, close to the spot where Jesus was born, when the whole church was ringing hour after hour with splendid hymns of praise to God, how again and again it seemed as if I could hear voices I knew well, telling each other of the Wonderful Night of the Savior's birth."

When he returned he wanted some way to express the stirring in his soul and he decided it would be best communicated in the form of a poem. That was when "O, Little Town of Bethlehem," was written. Lewis Redner, the organist, provided the tune.

Many years ago in the countryside of Bethlehem the townsfolk prepared for just another day, though this day was quite extraordinary. The shepherds were out tending to their sheep and the Jewish nation was feeling the restraints of Roman oppression. Everyone was ordered by a decree to come and register within their hometown and this is what brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. But Why Bethlehem?

In Matthew 2 when the wise men come from the East to Jerusalem looking for the one who was born to be king of the Jews, King Herod asked his bible scholars where the Christ was supposed to be born. They answered with the words of Micah 5, Bethlehem. Listen to Micah's words:

- 1 Now gather yourself in troops, O daughter of troops; He has laid siege against us; They will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek.**
- 2 "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting."**
- 3 Therefore He shall give them up, Until the time that she who is in labor has given birth; Then the remnant of His brethren Shall return to the children of Israel.**
- 4 And He shall stand and feed His flock In the strength of the Lord, In the majesty of the name of the Lord His God; And they shall abide, For now He shall be great To the ends of the earth;**
- 5 And this One shall be peace.**

Micah, lived in a mid-sized town called Moresheth which was located about 25 miles south of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 26:18) and he had a tough job! You see, God called him to warn his fellow Hebrews that because of their sin the promised land would be invaded. Pagan armies would besiege their cities—even a “a city of troops” like Jerusalem. Their king would be humiliated. His face would be “...stricken with a rod.” And Micah wasn’t alone in speaking out for God during this difficult time. A better-known prophet named Isaiah, was his contemporary, as were Hosea and Amos.

In the midst of the prophecy of judgment and suffering, God makes a promise -- there would be One who would come from David’s lineage and be King. This King would be a shepherd to God’s flock and would bring peace.

And it was all tied to a little town called Bethlehem, the place we remember each time we celebrate birth of our Lord. The little town of Bethlehem would not have impressed you from any angle. It was just five miles from the great city of Jerusalem. Its population at the time Jesus was born was estimated to be about 150. It was not a major crossroads, it had no notable resources. It was so small that in both Joshua 15 and Nehemiah 11 it is overlooked in the listing of cities in Judah.

Bethlehem was a quiet, shepherding community, but it did have some history. In the bible so many things happened there as a PREVIEW to the main event. God set the stage throughout 1700 years of history ... to prepare the world for this great event in history.

I. RACHEL IS BURIED THERE – Genesis 35:16-19

This is the FIRST REFERENCE to Bethlehem. Rachel is the wife of Jacob, called Israel, She is the bride of Israel. She died giving birth to Jacob’s youngest son. She asked the midwife to name him Benoni – “son of my sorrow.”

Jacob changed the name to Benjamin – “son of my right hand” --both of these names are terms used for the Messiah in the New Testament.

Jesus came into the world at Bethlehem, as a child of Israel. He came to His own people, Israel, to redeem them from the curse of the Law. We just read last week in Matthew 15:24 that Jesus said – **“I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”**

Jesus came to the lost sheep of Israel, but he was rejected. John 1:11 – **“He came unto his own, and his own received him not.”**

Rachel died in childbirth in Bethlehem. Jesus, Who was born in Bethlehem 1700 years later, would die in child-birth ... as He would give birth to the Church. DEATH is associated with Bethlehem ... and Jesus was wrapped in “swaddling clothes” ... laid in the manger. Just like He was wrapped in strips of cloth at His burial ... and laid in a tomb.

II. RUTH IS REDEEMED THERE – (Ruth 4:10-11)

Ruth’s Mother-in-Law, Naomi, was from Bethlehem ... then moved to Moab. When Ruth’s husband and Father-in-Law died, they moved back to Bethlehem. There, Ruth met Boaz, and they fell in love. They couldn’t marry, because they weren’t the nearest of kin.

When the near-kinsman wouldn’t purchase her property, Boaz talked with him. Boaz was given permission to purchase Ruth, along with her property.

Boaz redeemed his bride in Bethlehem. Jesus, born in a manger in Bethlehem, came to redeem His bride ... the Church. 1 Peter 1:18-19 – **“knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”**

REDEMPTION is associated with Bethlehem. A PREVIEW of the main event 1100 years later.

The Great-Grandson of Ruth & Boaz, King David from Bethlehem, set up his kingdom ... over which his descendent Jesus will one day rule.

III. DAVID WAS ANOINTED KING THERE – 1 Samuel 16:1,13

King David was the Great (39 times) Grandfather of Jesus. King David was also born in Bethlehem. This is why Mary & Joseph had to come to Bethlehem to be registered for the tax.

Jesus came into the world as a King. The Wise Men said: “Where is He that is born, the KING of the Jews?” A few days before His crucifixion, the crowds chanted (Luke 19:38) – “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

Although rejected by the people as their King, He was chosen by God. The people wanted a King to free them from the oppression of Rome.

BUT ... Jesus came to give them an INNER peace ... to be the King of their hearts ... NOT to set up an EARTHLY kingdom at that time.

- o He was crowned with THORNS, not a golden crown.
- o His scarlet robes were placed upon Him in mockery.
- o They placed a frail reed in His right hand for a scepter.

They spat upon Him ... mocked Him ... beat Him. YET ... He was born in Bethlehem to be the ONLY KING who could rule in the hearts of mankind and bring salvation to our souls. Rev. 1:5-6 – **“... Jesus Christ, who is ... the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood ... to Him be glory and dominion, forever and ever. Amen.”**

David was anointed as King of the Jews in Bethlehem. The ANOINTING OF A KING is associated with Bethlehem ... just a PREVIEW of what would happen 1000 years later in Bethlehem.

IV. DAVID WAS REFRESHED THERE – 2 Samuel 23:14-17

The Philistines had taken over Bethlehem, and David was hold up in a cave there. David desires some refreshing water from the well in Bethlehem. 1000 years later, the WATER OF LIFE would come forth as a babe in a manger from the same town. John 4:13-14

John 7:37 – **“In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.”**

REFRESHING WATER is associated with Bethlehem. This is just a PREVIEW of what would take place there 1000 years later.

V. THE MESSIAH IS PROPHESED AS COMING FROM THERE – Micah 5:2

Here we have the prophecy of the birth-place of the Messiah. 2 PICTURES are painted here:

From everlasting ... YET ... Born in Bethlehem.

John 1:1,14 – **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”**

Jesus, the Son of God, was eternal ... YET ... came in the flesh to live among us.

There could be no mistake as to where the Messiah would be born.

The Chief Priests & Scribes knew ... they told King Herod – Matthew 2:3-6 – ribbon. Herod told the Wise Men – 2:7-8

The angels told the Shepherds - Luke 2:11 – **“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”** Luke 2:15 – **“And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.”** The Messiah is associated with Bethlehem ... 700 years before His birth.

CONCLUSION: **“Bethlehem”** means ‘house of bread’. Jesus said (John 6:35) – **“I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”**

God chose Bethlehem out of all the towns on the earth. Then ... through 1700 years of history ... He set the stage for the main event ... the birth of His Son, Jesus.

Through Rachel ... BIRTH & DEATH are associated with Bethlehem.

Through Ruth ... REDEMPTION is associated with Bethlehem.

Through David ... the ANOINTING OF A KING is associated with Bethlehem.

Through David ... REFRESHING WATER is associated with Bethlehem.

Through Micah ... the MESSIAH is associated with Bethlehem.

I hope Brooks prayer in the last stanza of O Little Town of Bethlehem is your prayer today:

--"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 angles, the great, glad tidings tell. O come to us, abide with us, Our Lord Emmanuel." AMEN!