

## 12-13-2023 - Carols of Christmas – O Little Town of Bethlehem

Christmas carols bring us together . . . and bring us to the C-mas story.

We all have our favorites. Each has a story.

Written by **Phillip Brooks. 1868.**

Harvard grad, taught Boston's Latin School. Struggled. Prayer/Bible.

Episcopal Theological Seminary. 1861 - Holy Trinity Epis., Philadelphia.

– **Lewis Redner**, real est agent – organ & SS Superintendent. 30 - 1,000.

- Civil war took toll. He struggled to give what they needed: peace.

- Ap. 9, '65 - War ended, but then . . . Lincoln's funeral, Philadelphia.

- Sabbatical – mid-East. Changed his life. Darkness ended. Joy returned. Positive attitude, inspirational messages... yet - - -

- Brooks struggled to convey Bethlehem on C-mas Eve.

- Great oratory fell short. Rich experience, poor for words.

- **1868.** Didn't force words. Poem, shown to Redner.

- Then Redner struggled. Dec. 24, failed. In sleep, melody came. Christmas Day, 1868 – "O Little Town of Bethlehem" born.

**1.** Like the path to Bethlehem, Brooks' journey was rocky & winding.

- I can relate. Wanted to be a teacher. Frustrated.

Our own paths have twists & turns... it doesn't mean God isn't leading.

God has a purpose.

- Long & winding roads prepare us for the future. Train us. Mature.

**Ex:** Moses learned to lead as a Shepherd. 40 yrs. Father-in-law's sheep.

- God knows how to get us where we need to be.

- Caesar Augustus decree got Mary & Joseph to Bethlehem.

**2** – Brooks emptied himself trying to give what we can't give: **peace.**

Ever try to give peace to another? Very difficult.

- Peace comes from God, not our circumstances, not ourselves.

- The angel gave peace/reassurance to the Shepherds

- Jesus gave peace to the Disciples...

- The peace this world needs doesn't come from us.

**John 14:27** – "I give you peace, the kind of peace only I can give. It isn't like the peace this world can give. So don't be worried or afraid."

- 3** - Brooks' struggled to do something Grand... a **simple** poem came.  
 God had a grand plan for salvation... but it was **humble** in execution.  
 Savior would leave the glory of heaven ... to live a humble life.  
**2 Cor. 8:9** – *“For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”*  
 God's design is **reverse** of ours. Blessed...poor in spirit/kingdom.  
**Contrast:** *“Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light”*

Small, insignificant things have great **lasting impact**.

A **little town** – Bethlehem.

**Micah 5:2** – prophecy - *“But you, Bethlehem, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel”*

- **Matt. 2** – Herod consults w/ chief priests & scribes to tell the Magi where the Messiah was to be born. Answer is from the prophecy:
  - o *“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”* – **Matt. 2:6**

A **humble manger** – not a Graco convertible crib. Hay, not down pillow.

- o wrapped in swaddling clothes ... strips of cloth, Passover lamb.

Grew up in a **small town**, Nazareth.

- o **John 1** - Nathaniel: “can anything good come from Nazareth?”  
Philip – “come and see for yourself.”
- o **B/c** of small town, everyone knows... scandal – Mary & Joseph.  
Rode a donkey into Jerusalem. Not a camel (wise man), white stallion.  
Angels appeared to Shepherds. . . low in society, outsiders. **Small**

After Brooks wrote his poem, Redner struggled. Dec. 24, **failure**.

Brooks failed at teaching... Redner wanted grand... God worked.

Our pers. failures become **tools** for God. At the end of us, God begins...

- In surrender, we have victory.

In **sleep**, melody came. Christmas Day, 1868 – song was born.

- In Joseph's sleep, answer from angel: don't be afraid to take Mary ....
  - God sometimes talks to us in dreams b/c we don't argue.
  - o God works thru us. Get out of the way. Greatness is from God.

Brooks & Redner gave us a great C-mas carol. Simple. Powerful. Lasting.

- It's how God works: little becomes much.
  - Bethlehem – a tiny town – gave the world the greatest gift.
  - A King was born in a manger, b/c no room in the Inn.
    - This King has gone to prepare rooms for us.
- Bethlehem – was a small part of Judah. Insignificant place.
  - God is on the side of the small & weak. In our weakness...
  - He still uses the small & insignif to do great things for Him.

He was born in an obscure village,                    The child of a peasant woman.  
He grew up in still another village where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was 30  
Then for 3 years He was an itinerant preacher.  
He never wrote a book.    He never held an office.  
He never had a family or owned a house.    He didn't go to college.    He never visited a big city.  
He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where he was born.  
He did none of the things One usually associates with greatness.  
He had no credentials but himself.  
He was only 33 when the tide of public opinion turned against him.  
His friends ran away.    He was turned over to his enemies.  
And He went through the mockery of a trial.    He was nailed to a cross between two thieves.  
While he was dying, His executioners gambled for his clothing,  
    the only property he had on Earth  
When he was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave ... Through the pity of a friend.  
Twenty centuries have come and gone, And today he is the central figure Of the human race,  
And the leader of mankind's progress.  
All the armies that ever marched,  
All the navies that ever sailed,  
All the parliament that ever sat,  
All the kings that ever reigned,  
Put together have not affected the life of man on Earth  
As much as that One Solitary Life.  
- By Dr James Allen Francis

Song of the week: **“O Little Town of Bethlehem”** - by Vocal Band.