



DECEMBER 15, 2019
SERMON NOTES
"O LITTLE TOWN OF BETHLEHEM"
MICAHA 5:2-5a



I History

- A. Author of the carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem," Phillips Brooks, was an ordained Episcopal priest, who in 1862 became rector in of Holy Trinity church in the city of _____.
- B. Though he was not yet 30 years old and many other pastors hoped for the honor, Phillips Brooks was asked to provide the eulogy for the U.S. President _____.
- C. After serving as priest during a heart-wrenching time for the nation during the Civil War, Phillips Brooks parish paid for him to have a one-year sabbatical when he traveled to the _____ . It was this trip that inspired his writing of the Christmas carol.
- D. Late in life, Brooks befriended the young _____ when she was a student. She peppered him with questions about God, and her parents appreciated his simple, direct, and comforting answers. They later named this girl's little brother after Brooks.

II Bethlehem

- A. Micah prophesies about a baby who will be born in "Bethlehem Ephrathah," Bethlehem is a Hebrew word that means _____ . Ephrathah means _____ .
- B. Bethlehem is the site of one of the best love stories in the Bible, between _____ and _____ .
- C. King Herod believed the _____ but not enough to follow it to Jesus.

III Our Take Away

- A. Brooks meditates on the _____ nature of the event of Jesus's birth: "while mortals sleep," angels keep their watch and sing God's praise.
- B. The carol speaks to a longing for _____ to restore our souls.
- C. The last line of the carol does not sentimentalize Jesus's birth, but is a very powerful _____ , that calls us to take stock of our lives and consider whether Christ is truly our Savior.

Things I would like to remember about this message:

Asbury Daily Study Guide

INTRODUCTION

The carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem” is really an evangelistic prayer. “Evangel” means “good tidings” and the carol is a song of “good tidings,” the “best news,” that Christ has come into the world in order to redeem it. What does this great news mean to you this season? How does this news compare to the rest of the news you are hearing? With what words and in what ways will you share this good news with someone who needs to hear it this week?

Monday: Read Matthew 2:1-12: In the Christmas carol about Bethlehem, we remember that the prophecy about the city where Jesus would be born is of great importance to the magi, who followed not only a star, but their study of the Hebrew scriptures in order to find him. And when they found him, the scriptures say they “were overwhelmed with joy” (vs. 10) and moved to pay him homage. Will you too resolve to diligently study the scriptures this week, searching for the hope and joy God has in store?

Tuesday: Read Isaiah 6:2-3 and Luke 2:13-15: In the carol, gathering angels “praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.” While we often remember the way that angels startled the shepherds, do you ever think about the content of their praise? They sing to God’s glory and then give a blessing of peace to the earth. Does this praise of God’s holiness and peace go together in your mind? Why or why not?

Wednesday: Read Psalm 80:1-7 and Isaiah 2:1-5: The psalmist implores God to “Let your light shine, that we may be saved.” (Psalm 80:3) Isaiah longed for God’s people to “walk in the light of the Lord!” (Isa. 2:5). As he observed the city of Bethlehem, the author of the carol observed “In thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.” Where is God longing to shine light in darkness you may be experiencing today?

Thursday: Read Matthew 13:1-9; 31-33: In Micah 5:2, the prophet refers to Bethlehem Ephrathah as “small among the clans of Judah” and yet out of Bethlehem will come Israel’s great ruler. As you reflect on the parables that Jesus taught, what does Jesus teach us about “small things.” What “small thing” is Christ calling you to do today, out of which something great may come? Ask God to show you and then act on it today.

Friday: Read 1 Kings 19:11-13: Mother Theresa once said, “In the silence of the heart, God speaks.” As he takes in the Bethlehem landscape, the author of the carol reflects on its stillness and silence. For the prophet Elijah, the Lord was not in the earthquake or the fire, but God spoke in to him in “a sound of sheer silence.” In Ecclesiastes 3:7, the author reminds us “there is a time to be silent and a time to speak.” Take some time to be silent today, to see if God has something to say to you.

Moving Forward:

The final line of the carol is a prayer asking God to take away our sin and be born in us. The wonderful news of Christmas is not just that a baby came into the world, but that our souls could be reborn. If you were to take stock today, where would you say that you have fallen short of the person God longs for you to be? With a sincere heart, how might the prayer tucked in the last verse of “O Little Town” change you this week? “Cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today...O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!” May this be our prayer this week.

Answers to Sermon Notes: IA) Philadelphia; B) Abraham Lincoln; C) Holy Land; D) Helen Keller
IIA) House of Bread; B) Fruitfulness; C) Ruth and Boaz; D) prophecy
IIIA) cosmic; B) peace; C) prayer