

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Written by Dr. Harold R. Carpenter - Last Updated Sunday, 07 August 2011 17:57



Dr. Harold & Myrna Carpenter

TEXT:Micah 5:2

2 But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (Micah 5:2, KJV).

1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. 2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) 3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. 4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) 5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. 6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. 8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. 10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. 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. 16 And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. 17 And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this

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child. 18 And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them (Luke 2:1-20, KJV). INTRODUCTION:

On a cold night that was crisp and clear a small band of shepherds kept a lonely vigil over their flocks on the craggy hillsides outside the tiny town of Bethlehem some six miles southwest of Jerusalem. The stars in the sky above were like close friends. They knew them by name and they knew their locations.

The small fire just inside the mouth of the small cave that served as their refuge gave off just enough heat to break the sting of the night's cold.

Suddenly a brilliant white glow drove the stars into hiding. As the light grew brighter the sweetest melody ever heard by human ear began to echo across the rocky Judean hillsides. An just as suddenly these humble shepherds found themselves face to face with an angel of the Lord, who admonished them,

10 ...Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Luke 2:10-12, KJV).

No sooner had the angelic messenger finished speaking, the heavens were filled with a multitude angels forming the greatest choir ever witnessed or heard by men.

Struggling to conquer their fear the little band of shepherds said to one 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**" (Luke 2:15, KJV).

"But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah..."

The words tingle with excitement and mystery. Why Bethlehem? Where is Bethlehem? What

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role has it played in history to make it God's choice for the birthplace of His Son?

Actually Bethlehem is one of several names for the same place in Holy Scripture. The Hittites called it Luz, meaning the place of an almond tree.

Jacob first called it Bethel, which means the house of God. As he fled from his brother Esau he stopped on the road that runs North from Beersheba to spend a lonely night. With nothing more than a stone for a pillow he lay down for a brief respite from the troubles behind him and the long road ahead of him. It was here that he had his glorious dream of a ladder reaching to the heavens with angels ascending and descending to bring the blessings of heaven to a lonely fugitive. Listen to Jacob's amazed response to the heavenly dream:

16 And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. 17 And he was afraid, and said, How awesome is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven. 18 And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. 19 And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first (Gen. 28:16-19, KJV). But this place which represents the peak spiritual experience of Jacob's life also represents the deepest valley of his life as well. In Gen. 35:1 God tells Jacob:

1 ...Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother (Genesis 35:1, KJV).

15 And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel. 16 And they journeyed from Bethel; and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath: and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labour. 17 And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. 18 And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin. 19 And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem (Genesis 35:15, KJV).

When the love of his life died Jacob must surely have thought that he had misnamed the place, and that the old name of the Hittites was more appropriate. For you see, the word for almond tree in the Hebrew is *shakkade* and means the place for mourning or a vigil for the dead.

Never-the-less it is in this passage that this place is called Bethlehem for the first time in Sacred Scripture.

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Bethlehem! "The house of bread!" It is in this House of Bread that the Son of God will be born who is "The Bread of Life."

This morning we would like to consider three times that God chose to visit this sacred site to announce good news for all mankind:

I. A MAN FROM BETHLEHEM AND A REDEEMER FOR ISRAEL

- A. Elimelech of Bethlehem--"the house of bread"--but there was no bread! (Ruth 1:1)
- B. Mahlon and Chilion were Ephrathites (1:2) Ephratah--"the place of fullness"--but the cupboards were bare!
- C. A sad journey ensues as an impoverished family flees to Moab.
- D. Elimelech dies (vs. 3) and both Mahlon and Chilion die (vs. 5).
- E. Naomi returns barren and bitter to Bethlehem (1:20).
- F. Boaz redeems the land of Elimelech, acquires Ruth, and raises up an inheritance to his name.

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son. 14 And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. 15 And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him. 16 And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it. 17 And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:13-17, KJV). **II. A SHEPHERD FROM BETHLEHEM AND A KING FOR ISRAEL**

- A. Saul rejected as king over Israel because of his disobedience.

26 And Samuel said unto Saul, I will not return with thee: for thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD hath rejected thee from being king over Israel(1 Samuel 15:26, KJV). B. Samuel is commanded to go to Bethlehem to anoint a king.

4 And Samuel did that which the LORD spake, and came to Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:4, KJV). C. Seven

sons of Jesse pass for inspection but no king is chosen (1 Samuel 16:10).

- D. David is anointed king over Israel:

11 And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. 12 And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. 13 Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward (1 Samuel 16:11-13, KJV). **III. A BABY IN A MANGER IN BETHLEHEM AND A REDEEMER FOR ALL MANKIND**

- A. Joseph journeys from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the city of David (Luke 2:4, KJV).

- B. No room in the inn, but a place in the stable:

7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and

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laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn (Luke 2:7, KJV).

([The baby Jesus was laid] in the feeding trough in the "House of Bread.")

C. Shepherd tend their flocks in the fields outside the Little Town of Bethlehem.

D. An announcement from an angel of the Lord:

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord

(Luke 2:11, KJV).

E. A celestial choir breaks forth in song

F. Phillip Brooks, an Episcopal pastor, was visiting Jerusalem over the Christmas holidays in 1865. He was asked to assist in the midnight service at Bethlehem on Christmas eve night.

Borrowing a horse, he made the six mile journey to Bethlehem. He wrote of his experience later:

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. Brooks sat down and penned the words of the Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

CONCLUSION:

Most of us will never have the privilege of spending a Christmas eve in the fields of Bethlehem, yet our hearts are just as overwhelmed and overjoyed as that of Phillip Brooks when we hear the words of the angel of the Lord:

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. 12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 14 Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men (Luke 2:10-14, KJV).

Will you join with me in worshipping the King as we sing together Phillip Brook's Christmas carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem?"

If you have not yet bowed your knee before the King and recognized Him as your Savior, I invite you to do so now!

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This is the outline of the Christmas sermon Dr. Harold Carpenter preached 01 December 2002. Dr. Carpenter and his wife served as missionaries for twenty years. Dr. Carpenter also taught missions for twenty years at Central Bible College. He now serves as Pastor of Fair Grove Assembly of God, Fair Grove MO.

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