

Bethlehem

“Places in the Life of Christ”



“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.”

Luke 2:15

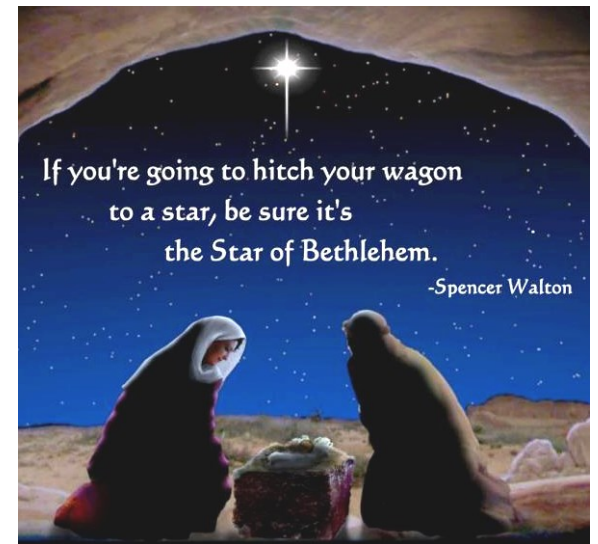
Most people associate the little town of Bethlehem* with the birth of Jesus Christ. Bethlehem means “house of bread” and much could be made of the fact that Christ said He was the bread of life but a discussion such as that which may be voiced by some scholars loses the true meaning as to why Christ was born in Bethlehem. The important thing is that Christ came down to earth to save us to eternal life with Him. It was a small town and that is welcoming, but it could have been in the city of Jerusalem if God had wanted it to be there.

Jerusalem is only about six miles from Bethlehem. There was a lot of history connected with Bethlehem. Many people mentioned in the Old Testament spent some time in Bethlehem including Rachel who was the wife of Jacob and the mother of Joseph and the other eleven children who were destined to become the twelve tribes of Israel.

The names of Elimelech with his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Chilion of Bethlehem are not very well known, but the story of the family moving to another country is fairly well known. Probably the best known line from this journey is the one statement from Ruth as Naomi was getting ready to return to Bethlehem after the death of her husband and her two sons. She told their wives to stay there and make a new life for themselves. But Ruth said *“Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God”* Ruth 1:16

Micah, an Old Testament prophet tells us *“But you, O Bethlehem are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past.”* Micah 5:2-5

I’ve often wondered what the people of Bethlehem thought about the people pouring into the town for the census. It probably was an opportunity for them to earn some extra money. Often when there is a play-off game or a tournament in a town, the success is measured by the amount of revenue that it



If you're going to hitch your wagon
to a star, be sure it's
the Star of Bethlehem.

-Spencer Walton

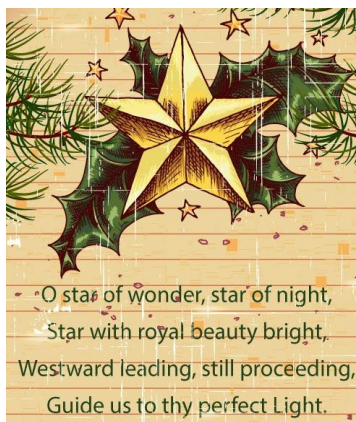
generates for that town. I wonder if many of them even knew that a young couple with child needed a place to stay. Did they pay any attention to the shepherds wandering into town or did they just ignore them?

We sing about the little town of Bethlehem at Christmas time and say *“How still we see thee lie.”* But I’m not sure it was still. There must have been many people there. Everyone was required to go for the census. If there had not been so much emphasis on it, why would Joseph have made Mary go when she was with child?

We can choose to ignore Christ or we can be like the shepherds and the wise men and follow Him. The choice is ours. I once wrote a short play called *“No Ordinary Town”* about men getting together for a coffee the day before the birth of Christ. It is fictional, but one has to wonder what the people of the little town were thinking. During the play Joseph wanders in and asks for a room. The men think he should

know there is no room in Bethlehem with the census. But by the end of the play the men knew they had seen something special. Timothy's last statement to Titus may be considered negative but he wanted Titus to believe—"May God bless you, Titus. Blessed are those who did not see, but still believe. And may he bless us all as we tell the world that the greatest moment in all history happened here in little Bethlehem last night. The King was born. I want to shout it from the mountain tops. I want my world to know. The Lord of Love has come to me. I want to pass it on to everyone." You can google the title and read the entire play.

I wonder how we would react to a stranger coming into town and a group of farmers from outside telling us they had been told by a group of angels that a baby was born to this strange couple and that baby was the king. I wonder if people knew that an angel appeared to Joseph and told him not to go home but to run away to Egypt. Wouldn't we think it was rather strange that they didn't go home to their home town with their relatives?



Bethlehem was chosen, but then they had to leave it for protection and Christ was taken to a foreign country.

O Little Town of Bethlehem

**O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie!
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep,
The silent stars go by.
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light.
The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight.
"For Christ is born of Mary,
And gathered all above,
While mortals sleep, the angels keep
Their watch of wondering love.
O morning stars, together
Proclaim the holy birth
And praises sing to God, the King,
And peace to men on earth.
"How silently, how silently,
The wondrous Gift is giv'n!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,
Where meek souls will receive
Him still,
The dear Christ enters in.
"O Holy Child of Bethlehem,
Descend to us, we pray;
Cast out our sins and enter in,
Be born to us today.
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell:
Oh, come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel!"**

By Phillips Brooks

Prayer: Wonderful Child of Bethlehem, thank You for coming down to us so that we may have eternal life with You. Thank you for being born for all of us regardless of our rank in life, our skin color, our age, or our political persuasions. We can pray with the words of "O Holy Child of Bethlehem, Descend to us, we pray; Cast out our sins and enter in, Be born to us today" Amen

1. Was it important that Christ was born in Bethlehem?
2. Do we ever tend to look down on people born to the poor, the needy, or a different social structure?
3. How would we assess a young child being born today and having someone tell us that new baby was going to save us? Would we let their social status or level of education influence our thoughts?
4. How can you pass on God's love to others? Can you "shout it from the mountain top"?

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info@rgscripts.com

"Bethlehem was no ordinary town. Much happened there. Strangers were welcomed. Naomi and her family left for a better life, but she was welcomed back along with her daughter-in-law who was even a different nationality. The King was born there— Emanuel, Savior, Master, Shepherd, God with us."