

O Little Town of Bethlehem

Devotional for December 25, 2020

By Major Brian Coles

In *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*, we read the story behind the well-known carol, "O Little Town of Bethlehem" by Phillips Brooks.

During a trip to the Holy Land in 1865, Brooks went to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem on Christmas Eve and worshiped there. He was deeply moved by this experience. Three years later, while pastoring the Holy Trinity Church in Philadelphia, Brooks desired to have a special carol for the children to sing in their Sunday school Christmas program.

Recalling the peaceful scene in the little town of Bethlehem, Brooks completed the writing of the text in just one evening. He gave a copy of the words to his organist, Lewis R. Redner, and requested him to compose a melody that would be easy for the children to sing.

On the evening just before the program was to be given, Redner awakened suddenly from his sleep with the present melody in his mind — and he quickly wrote it out. "O Little Town of Bethlehem" has been a favorite with children and adults around the world since that time.

"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 wond'ring 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 heav'n. 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 sin and enter in — be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell; O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel!

May the Christ of Christmas abide with you always.