

EX: To David, Bethlehem was home. And as he fought against the Philistines in the Valley of Rephaim, all he wanted as a taste of home—a **bit of water** from the well of Bethlehem.

2SM 23.16-17 ~ *Then the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate and carried and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it. He poured it out to the Lord ¹⁷ and said, “Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?” Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did.*

EX: The story of these mighty men would live on for generations—that they loved David so greatly that they fought that he might have a sip of **the waters of Bethlehem**. Years later, a woman from Samaria would come to Jesus and He would ask her for a drink: *The Samaritan woman said to him, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” (JN 4.9-10)*

AP: Jesus, born in the city that had a reputation of being a **place of sorrow and glory** and a **place of redemption** was also born in a city with a reputation for being a **place for special water**. And similarly to how David longed for the special waters of Bethlehem, now, Jesus taught of another **special water**: living water!

JN 4.13-14 ~ *Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*

Jesus would provide a **special water**: a water that would give life, eternal. And that water is offered to us, still, today! *Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (RV 22.1-2)*

CONCLUSION

ISRAEL/Bethlehem/Modern City

Today, the **little town of Bethlehem** is not so little anymore. It’s more than 23 times larger than Hodgenville! But its size in population is nothing in comparison to its impact.

MC 5.1-5a ~ *Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. ² But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. ³ Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴ And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he shall be their peace.*

This **“little town of Bethlehem”** had formed a reputation over the years: it was a place of **sorrow and glory, a place of redemption, and a place of special water**—and all of these reputations would be fulfilled in perfection in Christ!

LK 2.1-7 ~ *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*

INVITATION

#635 [TPCL-Bethlehem]
05/12/2025

O Little Town

PC ___ Pchd _____

TPCL

QUESTION: What made Bethlehem so special?

TRN TO MC 5

INTRODUCTION

ILL—Long Drives (since married Erin, gotten used to watching out the window as she drives; driving through Kentucky, saw **“Hometown of Abraham Lincoln”** signs) This shocked me—having been born and raised in IL—the **“Land of Lincoln”**, I had always just assumed the Lincoln’s birth had been in IL, too. Maybe that says something about the IL education system

GOVERNMENT/Abraham Lincoln/Birth Place - Hodgenville

GOVERNMENT/Abraham Lincoln/Birth Place – Memorial – Pt 1 & 2

It’s interesting to walk around the small, nondescript reconstructed cabin and think how one of the most impactful presidents of our nation was raised in such a place—poor, destitute, and seemingly without a future. And yet, what a future he had!

In a way, this **little town** of Hodgenville became such a crucial part of American history! It makes me wonder how often its repeated across human history: with little towns and families being the home of great and meaningful historical figures.

BACKGROUND

This time of year, we see decorations, lights, and displays, and hear music dedicated to the birth of Christ. Whatever your background or view of the religious implications of this holiday, you cannot help but admit: it’s a good thing to hear people openly discussing the incarnation of our God!

Phillips Brooks was born in Boston on December 13th, 1835. He graduated from Harvard in 1855—and shortly after graduation, he took a post at **“Boston Latin”**. He wasn’t particularly successful, and ultimately, he was fired.

HYMNS/O Little Town of Bethlehem/Phillips Brooks - Failure

I can empathize with Phillips’ feelings—and I believe most of us here can! We’ve all of us had that feeling where we see around us nothing but evidence of our failure. We feel unremarkable and unimportant, and we wish we could be something more than what we now are.

MC 5.2 ~ *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*

MC personifies this little village—**“Bethlehem Ephrathah”**—using much the same language. It was little—with a population likely numbering in the hundreds, at most. It was seemingly unimportant. But little did it know, it was in truth far more important than its size would suggest!

In 1866, Phillips traveled to Bethlehem for Christmas—and inspired by his journey, he penned the famous hymn: **“O Little Town of Bethlehem”**.

In truth, Bethlehem has an understated, but impactful history in scripture. Starting in **GN**, popping up again in **RH** and **2SM**, Bethlehem appears again, and again: as though God wanted to ensure that His people would make the connections between all of these things and the newborn savior who would be born within its boundaries. This morning, as the world reflects on the birth of our lord, let’s take a moment and review the history of His hometown, and what it tells us of God’s plan revealed through history!

BD1: The Gravesite of Rachel – A Place of Sorrow and Glory (GN 35.16-20)

HYMN/O Little Town of Bethlehem/Lyrics – Pt 1

The song meditates upon the dark streets of the small city—streets that would receive an everlasting light at the birth of Christ. It's interesting to see that, when we go to our first appearance of Bethlehem, it was similarly in a dark point in Jewish history.

GN 35.16-18 ~ *Then they journeyed from Bethel. When they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel went into labor, and she had hard labor. ¹⁷ And when her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, "Do not fear, for you have another son." ¹⁸ And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin.*

BKGRND: Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, had entered into labor during their journey. But her body couldn't survive the trauma. *So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem), ²⁰ and Jacob set up a pillar over her tomb. It is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day. (GN 35.19-20) Did you catch that?* Rachel's memorial: a tomb to a beloved wife at her passing, was erected in Bethlehem.

EX: And so, at its first appearance, Bethlehem would be considered **a place of sorrow and glory**—a place of death, but also of glorious life. For Benjamin—who would be raised to be a beloved and favored son of Jacob, would be born there. It would be a place of death and birth, sorrow and glory.

HYMN/O Little Town of Bethlehem/Lyrics – Pt 2

IS 53.3-5 ~ *He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. ⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*

AP: In much the same way, Christ, Himself, would echo the history of Bethlehem. His would be a life of both **sorrow and glory**. His birth in Bethlehem was intended by the Divine mind to bring to ours the echoes of sorrow at the death of Rachel, but also the echoes of a promised and glorious birth of a favored son. Christ's life would mimic the death, the suffering, and life, and the birth shown in Bethlehem all those years ago. And today, His life and birth also stands as **a place of sorrow and glory**—we sorrow at the suffering of our God—but we glory at His resurrection, and His ultimate exaltation. The story of Christ's suffering, death, and glory were hinted at in the place of His birth—**a place of sorrow and glory!**

PH 2.5-11 ~ *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

BD2: The Home of Ruth and Naomi - A Place of Redemption – (RH 1-4)

HYMN/O Little Town of Bethlehem/Lyrics – Pt 3

In the third verse of the song, we see an appeal to the glorious gift of **redemption** that we have in Christ. Interestingly, the next time that Bethlehem pops up in the Old Testament, is time where we see it appearing not as **a place of sorrow and glory**, but as **a place of redemption!**

B.ILL—The Book of Ruth (we see Naomi—a faithful Jewish mother-in-law; her daughter-in-law, Ruth, remains faithful to her, but they're both without inheritance or power in the age; Ruth ends up picking grain in the field)

RH 2.19-20 ~ *And her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law*

with whom she had worked and said, "The man's name with whom I worked today is Boaz." ²⁰ And Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a close relative of ours, one of our redeemers."

EX: What an amazing coincidence, right? How incredible to think that, of all the fields she could have worked in, she'd have worked in the field of man who could **"redeem them"**—who would be able to restore their right relationship and position again. **But, what does this have to do with Bethlehem?** Keep reading!

RH 4.9-12 ~ *Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰ Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day." ¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹² and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman."*

EX: Here, we see the revelation of where these events are taking place: in the city that had previously stood as **a place of sorrow and glory**, a new reputation would be created. Now, it would be remembered as the place where Ruth and Naomi and their family's place and property would be restored. This place where Jesus would be born would be a place that was known for being **a place of redemption!**

1PT 1.17-19 ~ *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.*

AP: What better place for our redeemer to be born than this city where Ruth and Naomi were redeemed? What better place for our justifier to be born than the place where justice was done? This little town of Bethlehem had become a place of **sorrow and glory**, but also **a place of redemption**—a reminder of the glorious gift that God had given, and that God would give again through His Son!

GL 3.11-14 ~ *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." ¹² But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*

BD3: The Well by the Gate – A Place for Special Water (2SM 23.13-17)

HYMN/O Little Town of Bethlehem/Lyrics – Pt 4

This little town may have been small in population, but it was grand in reputation: **a place of sorrow and glory** with its history with Rachel and Benjamin—**a place of redemption** with its history with Ruth and Naomi. And, as we turn to its final appearance in the Old Testament, we it had one final historical reputation—shown in the time of David, the great-grandson of Ruth.

2SM 23.13-15 ~ *And three of the thirty chief men went down and came about harvest time to David at the cave of Adullam, when a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁴ David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. ¹⁵ And David said longingly, "Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!"*