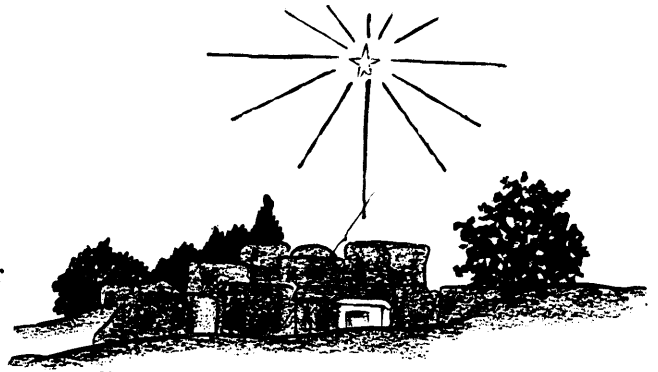


"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

Words by:
Phillips Brooks
1835 - 1893

Tune by:
Lewis H. Redner
1830 - 1908



Zipp! Zooom! Have you traveled on an expressway or toll road lately? Traffic whizzes by with only a quick glimpse at the signs to tell you the names of the towns you are by-passing. Or — if it's night — a glance in the direction of the town will reveal a sprinkling of lights with an air of mystery concerning the origin of the events being illuminated!

If Bishop Phillips Brooks had been among the travelers to Bethlehem at the actual time of the birth of Christ, he might never have guessed by the quietness of the town that a "special event" was happening. But when Brooks visited Bethlehem at Christmas in 1866, the meaning of that "special event" centuries before was known throughout the world, actually changing much of what had happened in world history.

Brooks had memorized hymn texts since he was a little boy — but this time, standing in Bethlehem as a grown man — Brooks memorized the whole look and feel and meaning of the moment! Two years later, Brooks put this "memorized moment" to the text, "O Little Town of Bethlehem", for his children at Holy Trinity Church, Philadelphia, to sing in their Christmas services. His church organist, Lewis Redner, composed the tune, "St. Louis".

Most Christmas hymns and carols describe only the past meanings of the Bethlehem event. Copy some of the phrases in the first two stanzas that tell of the past: _____

But Bishop Brooks' studies at Harvard and Alexandria Seminary, his service at the Holy Trinity Churches in Philadelphia and Boston, and his lifetime of devotion to God has helped him discover in his "memorized moment" at Bethlehem the most remarkable part of the Christmas story: THAT EACH TIME A PERSON PERMITS HIS HEART AND HIS LIFE TO BE FILLED WITH GOD'S LOVE, CHRISTMAS HAPPENS ALL OVER AGAIN! Look in the third and fourth stanzas for the words which show the meaning of the Bethlehem event in our own lives: _____

Which phrases of the melody are the same? Circle the accidentals in the melody. How many do you find? Do they add to or detract from the melody? Usually, accidents in any part point to a change in harmony. Listen to the chords involving accidentals. Are these ever the I-V-IV chords? On the third line, listen to the whole harmonic phrases to discover a "modulation" from the key of _____ to the key of _____. How do accidentals help make this modulation possible?

The next time you whiz along an expressway at night, look at the twinkling lights and wonder, "How many Christmas happenings are taking place"? Just as the first Christmas event changed the course of history, so you and I can cause amazing changes in the life space surrounding us by filling that space with God's love expressed in *our* actions!