



## O SING A SONG OF BETHLEHEM

Tune: Kingsfold

Is this a hymn for Christmas? Or is it for Good Friday, or Easter? It is really a hymn which can be sung any time during the year, because it is about the life of Jesus. Every line invites us to sing a song about a different place and a different event in His life. You will need to look at your Bible map to find the places listed.

Stanza 1 could be sung at Christmas, because it is about Bethlehem, shepherds, angels, light of a star, but chiefly about the song of the angels – “peace on earth” to men of good will.

Stanza 2 is about Nazareth and what has been called the “hidden years.” (All we know is that Luke says “Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man, vs. 52 of chapter 2). After the story of Jesus in the temple confounding the priests with His wisdom, there is nothing else about Him for nearly 20 years. (See Luke 2:39-52). We know He worked in His father’s carpenter shop, but the writer imagines that Jesus must have been like any other boy—enjoying playing in the sun, smelling the fragrant flowers, and feeling the soft wind blow in His face. Now that wind has carried the name of Jesus to every part of the world, and there are Christians everywhere.

Stanza 3 is about Galilee—a beautiful lake with woods and hills nearby. Jesus liked to go out on the lake in a boat, and one day a very strange thing happened during a storm. Find the story in Mark 4:35-41 and see what happened. Another time in Matthew 14:22-33 there is a story about Jesus walking on the water. Both of these stories can be found in stanza 3.

Stanza 4 is about Calvary. You probably can’t find this on the map, but it was a hill where Jesus was nailed to a cross (in the hymn it is called “the tree”) and where He was killed. But the hymn ends with the Easter story giving the assurance that Christ our Lord is able to save us now just as He did long ago.

Louis Benson, the author of the words, was a Presbyterian minister who became America’s first hymn scholar. He wrote a book on English hymns, a history of Christian hymnody, and edited four hymnals. You may find another of his hymns, *For The Bread, Which Thou Hast Broken*, in your hymnal.

The tune *Kingsfold* is a folksong equally popular in England and Ireland. The first, second and last lines are almost the same which makes it easy to learn and remember. The third line is the only one that is different. It is a modal melody which makes you feel more minor than major, but it is strong rather than sad.

Another tune which you may already know that can be sung to these words is “Forest Green.”

*Hymnstudy by Austin C. Lovelace*

