

# WHAT SO ★ PROUDLY ★ WE HAIL

*The American Soul in Story, Speech, and Song*

## O Little Town of Bethlehem

PHILLIPS BROOKS

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*It was a visit to Bethlehem itself that inspired Episcopal priest Phillips Brooks (1835–93) to write this carol. Then rector of the Church of the Holy Trinity in Philadelphia, he spent the Christmas week of 1865 in Bethlehem. Upon his return in September 1866, he began working on the carol, but it would not be completed until 1868, when Brooks, with organist Lewis Redner (1831–1908), set the words to music for a Christmas service.*

*The form of this hymn is somewhat unusual. It does not offer (until the last verse) direct praise or prayer to God, but rather addresses the little town itself. Why do you think Brooks made this choice? What image of Christmas does this song evoke? How are the “hopes and fears of all our years” met by Christmas Day? How does singing this song make you feel?*

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 given!  
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 sin and enter in  
Be born to us today.  
We hear the Christmas angels  
The great glad tidings tell  
O come to us, abide with us  
Our Lord Emmanuel.