

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Fourth Sunday in Advent – December 21, 2025

*“¹⁴Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold,
the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and shall call his name Immanuel.”*

- Isaiah 7:14 –

Just before Christmas in 1867, an Episcopalian pastor by the name of Phillips Brooks penned the beautiful Christmas hymn *O Little Town of Bethlehem*. Nothing about Phillips Brooks was small, neither in the physical sense nor in his personality. He stood at about 6’6” tall and weighed over 300 pounds. His preaching was known to have a similar impact as his physical appearance. Nevertheless, he was known to be one of the greatest preachers of his time, serving in Boston and Philadelphia.

In 1865 when he was 30 years old, Brooks visited the Holy Land, where he attended a five-hour Christmas Eve service. He was deeply moved by the music and hymns giving praise to God throughout those five hours.

Two years later in 1867, Brooks wanted to write a special Christmas hymn for the children in his congregation to sing on Christmas Eve. He wrote a poem, and his organist Lewis Redner composed music to go along with it. What was born was the beloved Christmas hymn we still sing today: *O Little Town of Bethlehem*.

The third verse poignantly directs us to the very heart of Christmas. *No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in.* Jesus came into this broken and sinful world to rescue us, to save us, from our sin and death and then give us eternal life with him.

God chose to come to into this world in the flesh. One of Jesus’ names is the Hebrew name *Immanuel*, which means “God with us.” God is with us even here and now. He lives in us and through us. Every time we share the Good News of the Gospel, (Christ came to live among us; he suffered; he died; he was buried in a tomb; and on the third day he rose from the dead, so that we might have life with him), we witness Jesus Christ among us. Jesus is with us no matter what. He promised us, before he ascended into heaven, that he would be with us to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

We can give the gift of God’s likeness through us. When our lives reflect the God who lives in us, we can be different from the world, and that difference can bless others with the transforming presence of his love and grace.