

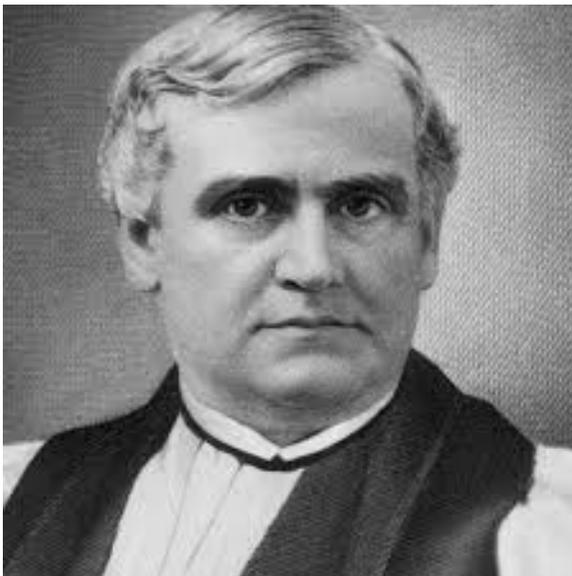
## Let's Go Deeper...

### Wednesday, December 23

Sunday's focus on Micah's prophesy of Bethlehem brought a carol and a preacher to mind.

But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,  
who are one of the little clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me  
one who is to rule in Israel,  
whose origin is from of old,  
from ancient days. (Micah 5:2-4)

The carol is "O Little Town of Bethlehem." The preacher, the author of the carol's text, is Phillips Brooks.



**Phillips Brooks** (December 13, 1835 – January 23, 1893) was arguably the greatest preacher of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and one of the most beloved. Standing six feet four inches tall and weighing nearly 300 pounds, Brooks had a commanding stature, but biographers note he failed early on as a teacher ("I do not know what will become of me and I do not care much... I wish I were fifteen years old again. I believe I might become a stunning man: but somehow or other I do not seem in the way to come to much now"). Neither was his voice a match for his stature and vocation. It is said

the first time he preached in Westminster Abbey he could not be heard beyond the first row. Serious voice lessons ensued.

In time, however, the Harvard grad became the esteemed Rector of Boston's Trinity Church and briefly Bishop of Massachusetts. An abolitionist before the Civil War and an advocate for the voting rights of freed slaves during Reconstruction, Brooks is also renowned for eulogizing Abraham Lincoln as well as introducing a young Helen Keller to Christianity and corresponding with her by letters as she grew into adulthood.

Volumes of Brooks' sermons are available for perusal. Here are a few delectable quotes for your Christmas stocking:

- The earth has grown old with its burden of care, but at Christmas it always is young, the heart of the jewel burns lustrous and fair, and its soul full of music breaks the air, when the song of angels is sung.
- Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks... I do not pray for a lighter load, but for a stronger back.
- Be such a person and live such a life, that if every person were such as you, and every life like yours, this earth would be God's Paradise.
- Jesus Christ, the condescension of divinity, and the exaltation of humanity.
- The person who has begun to live more seriously within begins to live more simply without.
- Charity should begin at home, but should not stay there.
- Christianity helps us face the music even when we don't like the tune.
- Some day, in years to come, you will be wrestling with the great temptation, or trembling under the great sorrow of your life. But the real struggle is here, now, in these quiet weeks. Now it is being decided whether, in the day of your supreme sorrow or temptation, you shall miserably fail or gloriously conquer. Character cannot be made except by a steady, long-continued process.

What was the source of this great soul's warmth and wisdom? In response to someone who asked him, Brooks wrote in 1891, "...These last years have had a peace and fullness which there did not use to be. I do not think it is the mere quietness of advancing age...it is a deeper knowledge and truer love of Christ...I cannot tell you how personal this grows to me. He is here. He knows me and I know Him. It is no figure of speech. It is the realest thing in the world. And every day makes it realer. And one wonders with delight what it will grow to as the years go on."

Here's to the hope that you will know "the holy child of Bethlehem" as Phillips Brooks did, not as a precious memory but as an ever-present reality. And may you, too, "wonder with delight" at where our journey with Christ Jesus will lead us in the New Year.

I hope to see you at one of our Christmas Eve Services as we join our voices in singing Brooks' timeless carol. Here's a version for your listening pleasure:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lj2fwME46GM>