

## My Prayer Journal

*Use this weekly prayer to help you begin your time with God each day.*

**Prayer of Confession:** Living God, Love Incarnate, we confess that we are not perfect. You who are everything, we acknowledge that we are lacking. Child of the manger, we admit that we prefer to be sentimental rather than sacrificial. Hear us now as we confess our faults and admit our frailties. O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us we pray. Cast out our sin and enter in; be born in us today.

## My Prayers this Week:

## Family Time:

You probably know that Jesus was born in a town called Bethlehem. The Bible refers to Bethlehem as a “small town,” and you might even know the Christmas carol called “O Little Town of Bethlehem”! But have you ever thought about *why* Jesus was born in a small town? Have you wondered why Jesus wasn’t born in a big, royal city where lots of really important people already lived? Well, again and again, the Bible tells stories about how God makes the most amazing things happen in the most unexpected places! Maybe you know the story of how God chose the young boy David to become king of Israel, over all of his bigger and stronger brothers. That story happened in Bethlehem, too! The point is that even though we sometimes expect to find greatness in famous people and places, God doesn’t! God likes to take what the world thinks is unimportant, and make something amazing come out of it—like Jesus!

## MONDAY 12.12.22

## Luke 2:1-7

This week, we will be looking at the beautiful carol “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” Today’s passage is the familiar text from Luke’s Gospel where we read about Mary and Joseph’s journey from Nazareth, where they lived, to the small village of Bethlehem, which was the village of Joseph’s heritage. Whereas Nazareth is a very obscure town, with no Old Testament references, Bethlehem is frequently referred to there. In Genesis 35:19, Rachel, the wife of the patriarch Jacob, is said to have died and been buried on the road to Bethlehem. A minor “judge,” or leader, of Israel, before the tribes were united into a kingdom, whose name was Ibzan, was from Bethlehem (Judges 12:8). Bethlehem was the home of Elimelech and Naomi, and was where Naomi’s widowed daughter-in-law Ruth married Boaz, and gave birth to Obed, the father of Jesse, and the grandfather of David (Ruth 1:1-2 and 4:13-17). 1 Samuel 16, then, tells the story of how, at Jesse’s home in Bethlehem, Samuel anointed David to become Saul’s successor as king of the newly united nation of Israel. Thus, when the census ordered by Caesar Augustus required men to travel to their ancestral land to be registered, it was to Bethlehem that David’s descendant Joseph traveled with his pregnant wife, Mary.

- What makes the location of Jesus’ birth so significant?

## TUESDAY 12.13.22

## Micah 5:2

The “Little Town of Bethlehem” was, in truth, a “little town”! Writing almost 300 years after King David began to reign over the Kingdom of Israel, but still 700 years before Jesus would be born, the prophet Micah proclaimed that Bethlehem—“small among the clans of Judah” - would be the birthplace of “one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from old, from ancient times.” Micah’s prophecy came from the period of time when the Kingdom of Israel had been divided into two rival kingdoms, Israel and Judah, and when the mighty nation of Assyria was threatening to destroy both kingdoms. Several passages in Micah’s short prophetic book began to give rise to the hope that some day, an “anointed one” (a “Messiah”) would come to deliver Israel from its oppressors. The general expectation of the Messiah expressed elsewhere in the book becomes extraordinarily specific here, in 5:2, as Micah specifically locates His birthplace in “Bethlehem Ephratha,” the ancient home of King David. Over 300 years since the time of David, Bethlehem had fallen into even greater obscurity than it had been then, as the mighty capital of Jerusalem, built a mere five miles away, grew and thrived.

- How many reasons can you think of for why Jesus was born in Bethlehem, of all places? What do they say about God?

## WEDNESDAY 12.14.22

## Isaiah 60:15-22

The first verse of “O Little Town of Bethlehem,” after describing the peaceful scene of stillness that is portrayed on so many Christmas cards and Nativity scenes, goes on to proclaim, “Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting light.” There are only two places in Scriptures where the phrase “everlasting light” is used—in verses 19 and 20 of today’s Scripture reading from the book of Isaiah. This is another Messianic passage from a dark period in Israel’s history. With the imminent threat of Babylonian destruction and exile, Isaiah promises that a future day of peace, joy, and salvation is coming. In that dark day, Isaiah twice proclaims, “the LORD will be your everlasting light.” Our carol, then, makes the bold assertion that with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, the longed-for day that Isaiah prophesied about has finally arrived! Jesus is the LORD who is everlasting light, proclaiming in John’s Gospel, “I am the light of the world”! With the coming of Jesus, the hoped-for day when peace and righteousness reign has begun. Later, in John’s Revelation, John picks up Isaiah’s theme, looking forward to the day of Christ’s return, when “The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the Glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” (Revelation 21:23)

- What is your experience of Jesus bringing light to darkness?

## THURSDAY 12.15.22

## Job 38:4-7

Verse three of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” makes the plea: “O morning stars together, proclaim the holy birth, and praises sing to God the King, and peace to all on earth.” There is only one verse in all of Scripture that speaks of the morning stars singing together, and it is found in today’s passage from the book of Job. There, God finally replies to Job’s request to have an audience with God, since Job feels that he is being unjustly punished for sin he has not committed. God begins His reply by asking Job if he was there when God created the universe, with God saying that it is at that momentous time that “the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.” The author of our carol is taking biblical language of the Creation and applying it to the birth of Jesus! In doing so, the song subtly hints at the arrival of the New Creation anticipated by the prophetic, Messianic passages in Micah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others. Luke tells us that, just as at the original Creation, angels shouted for joy at the birth of Jesus. The carol, then, calls upon the morning stars to recognize the New Creation that is coming upon the earth with the coming of Jesus, and to join the angels in their praise!

- How will you join the angels and morning stars in their songs of praise? What makes Jesus’ birth worthy of such praise?

**FRIDAY 12.16.22**

**Revelation 3:19-20**

The end of the third verse of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” contains these comforting words: “No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive Him, still the dear Christ enters in.” These words echo closely the words of Jesus in today’s Scripture reading from the book of Revelation. In these words directed to the church in Laodicea (the church with a “lukewarm” faith), Jesus calls upon the people living there to acknowledge and to earnestly repent of their sin. Jesus promises that He is standing at the door of every sinner’s heart, patiently waiting for them to desire repentance of sin, and to invite Him into their lives. In the busyness of life, and with the loud and intrusive voice of temptation to sin ever present, Jesus’ voice and knocking can be difficult to discern. Nevertheless, it is there, constantly, patiently waiting to be heard. As the carol says, it is a voice and a knock not heard by human ears, but heard in the silence of our hearts. In a world in which meekness is understood as weakness, Jesus still asks us to quiet our souls, confess our sin and our sinful natures, and in humble, submissive meekness to open the door of our souls to Him.

- How have you experienced the rebuke and discipline of God calling you to repentance? Did you open the door to Jesus?

**SATURDAY 12.17.22**

**Isaiah 7:14**

The final verse of “O Little Town of Bethlehem” is meant to serve as the singer’s personal response to the third verse’s encouragement to receive Jesus, as we read about yesterday, and to actually invite Him into our lives. “O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray; cast out our sin, and enter in, be born in us today ... O come to us, abide with us, our Lord Emmanuel.” The short passage from Isaiah that we conclude this week’s study with reminds us that from the earliest days of Israel’s Messianic hopes, the promise of salvation involved the birth of a child who would be called “Emmanuel.” The name “Emmanuel” (sometimes spelled “Immanuel”) is simply a compound Hebrew word which means “God with us.” Isaiah’s hope of salvation lay in a baby to be born of a virgin, who would be the manifestation of God right here with us. To call Him “our Lord” means that we acknowledge Him as our master, to whom we owe our allegiance and our obedience. As “God with us,” what other title would suffice? The final invitation of the carol, then, is to pray for a permanent, abiding relationship with God, who was born in the flesh in Bethlehem, but is eternally present with us today as our Lord Emmanuel.

- How are you experiencing the abiding presence of Jesus this Advent season? Where are you spending time with Him?



Daily Study Guide

December 11-17, 2022

**Sermon Series: Carols**

**Week Three: “O Little Town of Bethlehem” - Rev. J. David Israel**

*Scripture for Sunday, December 11: Luke 1:39-55 (CEB)*

*“Mary got up and hurried to a city in the Judean highlands. She entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. With a loud voice she blurted out, “God has blessed you above all women, and he has blessed the child you carry. Why do I have this honor, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby in my womb jumped for joy. Happy is she who believed that the Lord would fulfill the promises he made to her.” Mary said, “With all my heart I glorify the Lord! In the depths of who I am I rejoice in God my savior. He has looked with favor on the low status of his servant. Look! From now on, everyone will consider me highly favored because the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name. He shows mercy to everyone, from one generation to the next, who honors him as God. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations. He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed. He has come to the aid of his servant Israel, remembering his mercy, just as he promised to our ancestors, to Abraham and to Abraham’s descendants forever.”*

*Things that really impacted me from today’s sermon:*

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**Prayer Requests**

- Pat Primm
- Sandra Lewis
- Karen Tanaka
- Mitch Mitchell
- Bill Reichter
- Art Schnatterly
- Nini Schneider
- Jim Kionka
- Kathy Westholt
- Naomi Seacoy
- Tina Vaughn
- Aubrey O’Sullivan
- Traci Bergmeier
- Norton Family
- Fowler Family
- Celeste Kocot
- Coleman Family
- Young Family
- Craig Miller
- Marty Schnatterly
- Kim Short
- Baby Milo

The Sorenson family for the passing of Dave Sorenson

**Share prayer requests online at [livingwordumc.org](http://livingwordumc.org)**