



## ON OUR WAY TO BETHLEHEM

**Hymn:** “O Little Town of Bethlehem”

*LW 60, TLH 647*

**Reader 1:** I wonder what it was like to be a part of the events in the hymn we just sang? What was it like to be Mary or Joseph or the angels who watched in wonder and were the first to tell of our Savior’s birth? Let us step back in time as we hear the words of the prophet Micah who had foretold of His coming 700 years before.

**Reader 2:** *“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”* Micah 5:2

**Reader 1:** Through Isaiah, our Lord told us of a sign that would be a foreshadow of events of the future.

**Reader 2:** *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.* Isaiah 7:14

**Reader 1:** We go forward in time to the events leading to this wondrous night. The Gospel of Luke tells of the angel Gabriel coming to Mary:

**Reader 2:** *In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible with God.”* Luke 1:26-37

**Reader 1:** Although Mary was “pledged” to Joseph, it was the same as being married according to Jewish law. Can you picture yourself as Mary? An angel has told you that you will give birth to a child, a son, and has even given you the Name by which you are to call him, Jesus, which means the Lord saves. What would your reply have been?

**Reader 2:** *“I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said.” Then the angel left her.* Luke 1:38

**Reader 1:** Mary, having heard the news that Elizabeth was with child, hurries to a town in Judea to see her. Upon hearing Mary’s voice, the baby in Elizabeth’s womb leaped for joy. Elizabeth responded:

**Reader 2:** *“Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished!”* Luke 1:42b-45

**Hymn:** “My Soul Now Magnifies the Lord” *LW 211, TLH 275*

**Reader 1:** Let’s not forget Joseph. Matthew tells us that he was a righteous man and did not want to expose Mary to public disgrace. He was considering divorcing her quietly.

**Reader 2:** *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel,” - which means, “God with us.” When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.* Matthew 1:20-25

**Hymn:** “Hark the Glad Sound! The Savior Comes” *LW 29, TLH 66*

**Reader 1:** Mary and Joseph, a carpenter, settled into their home in Nazareth awaiting the birth of our Savior. Then Caesar, Emperor of the Roman world, issued a decree for a census to be taken. It meant that Mary and Joseph must go to register in Joseph’s town of Bethlehem for he was a descendant of David. That was 70 miles away and Mary’s time to deliver was very near.

- Reader 2:** *While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:6-7*
- Reader 1:** In the stillness of that most holy night, messengers of our Lord went to the fields nearby.
- Hymn:** “While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night” *LW 70, TLH 109*
- Reader 1:** God’s angels had come not to royalty or leaders, but to the lowly shepherds in the fields that night.
- Reader 2:** *An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you: he is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” Luke 2:9-14*
- Hymn:** “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing” *LW 49, TLH 94*
- Reader 2:** *When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” Luke 2:15*
- Reader 1:** And they hurried off to find Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. They must have been very excited. Wouldn’t you be? The birth of the long promised Savior and the angels had brought the message to them!
- Hymn:** “Away in a Manger” *LW 64*
- Reader 1:** What would your reaction have been if you had seen Him? Could you have kept the news to yourself?
- Reader 2:** *When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told. Luke 2:17, 18, 20*

**Reader 1:** Let us pray:

**All:** Dear Father, Forgive us when we, who have not only witnessed Jesus' birth through Your Word, but also His death and resurrection, keep Your wonderful news of our Savior's birth to ourselves. Our sins have indeed been forgiven. How much more we have to tell than the shepherds did on that glorious night. May we, by the power of Your Spirit, go and tell those things which we have seen and heard, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**Reader 1:** Let us begin proclaiming the birth of our Savior as we sing:

**Hymn:** "Joy to the World, the Lord is Come" *LW 53, TLH 87*

All Scripture is from NIV.