

## Day 1: There's a Song in the Air

Nov. 28

*1 There's a song in the air!  
There's a star in the sky!  
There's a mother's deep prayer  
and a baby's low cry!  
And the star rains its fire  
while the beautiful sing,  
for the manger of Bethlehem  
cradles a King!*

*2 There's a tumult of joy  
o'er the wonderful birth,  
for the virgin's sweet boy  
is the Lord of the earth.  
Ay! the star rains its fire  
while the beautiful sing,  
for the manger of Bethlehem  
cradles a King!*

*3 In the light of that star  
lie the ages impearled;  
and that song from afar  
has swept over the world.  
Every hearth is aflame,  
and the beautiful sing  
in the homes of the nations  
that Jesus is King!*

*4 We rejoice in the light,  
and we echo the song  
that comes down through the night  
from the heavenly throng.  
Ay! we shout to the lovely  
evangel they bring,  
and we greet in his cradle  
our Savior and King!*

**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)**

In 1904, Wesleyan University music professor Karl Harrington was working on a monumental assignment outside of his university duties. He was editing a new hymnal for the Methodist Church. This was a daunting task because he would be choosing hymns to be used by large, wealthy congregations in some of the biggest cities in the United States as well as songs to

be sung by tiny rural congregations spread across the poorest parts of the country. Some churches boasted world-class pipe organs, whereas others didn't have even a simple guitar to accompany the few untrained and off-key voices that would praise God together. The hymnal was in those days the most important tool in the churches, next to the Bible.

While preparing this work, Harrington came across a poem entitled, *There's a Song in the Air*, written by Joseph Holland. The words instantly gripped Harrington, who thought, "Too bad it hasn't been set to music." He immediately took the piece to the organ in his office, and, sounding out the words aloud, he quickly wrote a tune to which *There's a Song in the Air* has ever since been voiced.

The song begins with an air of anticipation, the soft music mirroring the lyric: "There's a song in the air! There's a star in the sky!" leading us to wonder what it's all about. Next is pictured a mother praying over her baby. But then the music suddenly elevates in volume and register: "And the star rains its fire while the beautiful sing, for the manger of Bethlehem cradles a King!"

This Christmas song, as well as so many others, highlights Bethlehem as the scene of the nativity, and indeed it was. Why Bethlehem? Some 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Micah prophesied that from this small city would one day come Israel's true king "whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." This is a startling assertion – that any human being could also be eternal. But that is exactly what Micah foretold.

But again, why Bethlehem specifically? Two reasons: first, Bethlehem was also the birthplace of King David, who was Israel's greatest ruler. The prophet Isaiah had foretold that the Messiah would be from the lineage of David (Isaiah 11).

Second, the name Bethlehem is itself significant. *Beth* is the Hebrew term for *house*. And *lehem* translates as *bread*. Bethlehem, therefore, is the *house of bread*. Jesus came, declaring of himself, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35). He continued: "This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever" (John 6:58). Yes, the Bread that came down from heaven came from the House of Bread (Bethlehem) from which was coming one "whose origin is from of old, from ancient days." And this one would grant eternal life to all who feast upon him.

Indeed, "The manger in Bethlehem cradles a King!"

## Questions

1. What sources of Christian music do we rely upon today?
2. How does thinking about the many prophecies surrounding the birth of Jesus affect your personal faith?
3. What are some of the ways you can feast upon Jesus, the Bread of life?

## Prayer

Jesus, we stand amazed at how fully the prophets of old described so much about you in advance of your coming. No one could have put it all together until it unfolded, and yet in looking back we see how perfect was your plan. We marvel at your plan, but we are most amazed that you have in fact given yourself as bread for our souls. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.