

Bethlehem 2023

Where earth and heaven meet

O little town of Bethlehem
How still we see thee lie
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The everlasting Light

**The hopes and fears of all the years
Are met in thee tonight**

How silently, how silently
The wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
The blessings of His heaven.
No ear may hear His coming,
But in this world of sin,

**Where meek souls will receive him, still
The dear Christ enters in.**

O holy Child of Bethlehem
Descend to us, we pray
Cast out our sin and enter in
Be born to us today
We hear the Christmas angels
The great glad tidings tell

**O come to us, abide with us,
Our Lord Emmanuel**



The Nativity scene in the Lutheran Church in Bethlehem - with 'Christ' lying in a stable of rubble and destruction.

This year, more than in any other in our life-time, the carols we sing take on a different significance.

This year, the streets and inns of Bethlehem, usually filled with pilgrims and visitors, are empty. Movement is restricted, curfews apply; there is no tree, no festive lights, no celebrations – only the quiet heart-felt prayers of the few who are able to meet in the place where Jesus was born.

Please pray this Christmas for all those who live in the land we call 'holy' – pray for the gift of God's peace in every heart.

A Quote for 2023 Christmas:

'When we pray or celebrate the sacraments of the new creation, or sing our Advent carols, we affirm this promised reality: that heaven and earth are not mutually remote territories but closer to one another than we could think. Once we have been healed from that lethal wound that has broken our connection with living truth, healed from the terrible fiction that freedom is separation rather than communion, then the world is made new.'

Rowan Williams 8.12.2023