O Little Town Of Bethlehem

By Deborah Wassenberg

Introduction:

Most children will recognise the Christmas Carol 'O Little Town of Bethlehem' even if they don't know all the words. It was written by Phillips Brooks and was first used in a Sunday School Christmas service in 1868. Brooks wrote it for children of his Church after visiting Bethlehem in 1865 and attending a Christmas Eve service there. The experience left a lasting impression on him and inspired the much-loved carol that provides the foundation for this Christmas lesson.

Carol: O Little Town of Bethlehem

Bible Lesson: The Coming Messiah
Bible References: Micah 5:2; John 6:35

Visuals You Will Need:

1. Township signs
2. Township sign 'Bethlehem'
3. Words: House of Bread
4. Prophet Micah
5. Joseph, Mary and Jesus in the stable
6. Object: Loaf of bread in a basket covered with a tea towel
7. Jesus teaching
8. Object: use the loaf of bread to illustrate your points
9. 4 Pictures:
    - Manna
    - Bread in the Tabernacle/Temple
    - Jesus feeds the multitudes
    - The Last Supper

Words:

1. How would you like to live in a place called 'Eggs and Bacon Bay'?
   It's located in Tasmania, and Lady Jane Franklin named it after her favourite breakfast!
   How about living in the town of Boing Boing?
   It's not bouncy.
   The name comes from an Indigenous word describing mosquitoes buzzing around.

Would you like to live in a place called Dead Cat Gully?
Or Banana? (The Queensland town was actually named after a yellow-coloured bullock called Banana!)
Every town's name has a meaning.
Sometimes the meaning tells us something about the place.
Sometimes it tells us about an important event or person connected to it.

2. In today's Christmas lesson, we're going to learn about a small town with a very important name.
   It wasn't a big city.
   It wasn't famous for its wealth or power.
   In fact, many people probably rode straight through it without giving it a second thought.
   The town was called Bethlehem.

3. Does anyone know what Bethlehem means?
   Bethlehem means 'House of Bread.'
   That might not sound very exciting.
   At most, it might sound like the town has a good bakery.
   But God had a special plan for this little town.

4. Hundreds of years before Jesus was born, the Prophet Micah gave an amazing prophecy:
   '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…'
   Micah said that a ruler would come from Bethlehem.
   Not from the capital city.
   Not from the biggest city.
   Not from the richest city.
   From little Bethlehem.
   God often chooses things that seem small and ordinary to do extraordinary things!

5. About 700 hundred years after Micah wrote those words, Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem because the Roman government ordered everyone to register for a census.
   The town was crowded.
   There was no room for them to stay.
   And there, in that little town Jesus was born.
   The One Micah had prophesied about.
   The Bread of Life was born in the 'House of Bread'.

6. *(Uncover the loaf of bread and show it to the children)*
   What happens if you don't eat food for a long time?
   (Allow responses)
   Eventually our bodies become weak.
   We need food every day because food gives us life, strength, and energy.

7. When Jesus grew up and was teaching people, He said,
   'I am the Bread of Life.
   Whoever come to me will never grow hungry.'
   Jesus wasn't saying He was made of bread!
   He meant that just as bread keeps our bodies alive,
   He gives life to our hearts and souls.

8. If you're hungry, it's not enough to look at bread.
   (Show it to a child or volunteer)
   If you're hungry, it's not enough to smell the bread.
   (Allow a child or volunteer to sniff the bread)
   If you're hungry will talking about the bread help?
   No.
   What do you have to do?
   You have to eat the bread.
   In the same way, it's not enough to just know about Jesus.
   You must trust Him personally.
   You need to receive the gift He came to give you.

9. Throughout the Bible, God kept using bread to teach people about Jesus.
   - God fed the Children of Israel with manna in the wilderness.
   - Bread was placed in the Tabernacle and Temple as a reminder of God's presence.
   - Jesus multiplied bread to feed thousands.
   - At the Last Supper, Jesus broke bread and said it pointed to Him.

   All these things were helping people understand that Jesus is the One who truly satisfies our deepest need.
   You need more than food.
   You need forgiveness.
   You need hope.
   You need a Saviour.
   And that's why Jesus came.
   Bethlehem was the House of Bread.
   Jesus is the Bread of Life.
   And at Christmas, God sent the Bread of Life into the House of Bread so the whole world could be fed with His love, grace and salvation!
   That's the wonderful message hidden inside the little town of Bethlehem.

Ministry to the Children:

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, He wasn't just another baby. Jesus is God's Son. He came from heaven to earth because every one of us has a problem called sin. Sin is when we disobey God, do wrong things, or choose our own way instead of God's way. Sin separates us from God, and there is nothing we can do on our own to fix that problem. That's why Jesus came. Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again so that we could be forgiven and become part of God's family. Jesus is the Bread of Life. Just as bread gives life to our bodies, Jesus gives eternal life to everyone who trusts Him. Jesus, the Bread of Life, was born in

Bethlehem, the House of Bread. He came so that everyone who trusts in Him can have forgiveness, new life, and be part of God's family forever.

Memory Verse: John 6:51a

'I am the living bread that came down from heaven.'

Memory Verse Actions:

'I am'	point upward
'the living'	wiggle fingers upwards like something growing and alive
'bread'	cup hands together as if holding a loaf of bread
'that came down'	move both hands downward from above the head
'from heaven'	point upwards to the sky

Say the Verse in Different Voices:

- Angels choir voice (loudly and triumphantly)
- Shepherds voice (calling across the hillside)
- Wise Men's voice (amazed after a long journey)
- Innkeeper's voice (rushed and busy)
- Donkey voice (slow and plodding)
- Mary's voice (quietly - don't wake the baby)

Game: Around Bethlehem

You Will Need:

- One soft ball
- Plenty of space
- Large group standing in a circle
- Christmas Carol playing: O Little Town of Bethlehem to stop and start
- List of words and actions for a volunteer to call out

How to Play:

The ball is passed quickly around the circle while the Christmas Carol plays. When the music stops, the volunteer calls out a word. The child must do the corresponding action.

- Inn (knock on the door)
- Stable (make a donkey sound)
- Field (pretend to watch sheep)
- Road (march like a Roman soldier)

- Bread (pretend to knead dough)

Then the music starts again and the ball continues around the circle.

Craft: House of Bread Pop-Up Card

You Will Need:

- A4 cardstock or construction paper
- Scissors
- Glue stick
- Markers or crayons
- Pre-cut bread loaf template

Preparation:

Fold a sheet of cardstock in half to make a card.

Step 1: Make the Pop-Up

1. Keep the card folded.
2. Along the folded edge, cut two parallel slits about 4 cm long and 3 cm apart.
3. Open the card.
4. Push the cut section inward to create a rectangular pop-up step.
5. Fold the card closed and reopen it to make sure the pop-up works.

When opened, a small platform should stick out from the centre of the card.

Step 2: Create the Bread

1. Cut out a loaf of bread shape from tan or brown paper using the template.
2. Decorate it with darker brown lines for crust.
3. Write:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven." John 6:51a on the loaf or on the reverse side.

Step 3: Attach the Bread

Glue the bread loaf onto the front of the pop-up platform. When the card opens, the loaf should spring forward.

Step 4: Decorate Bethlehem

Inside the card draw:

- Small Bethlehem houses

- A stable
- The Christmas star
- Hills around the town
- See the copyright free illustrations below for ideas

At the top write: Bethlehem, The House of Bread

Step 5: Decorate the Front Cover

- Add: O Little Town of Bethlehem
- Add: Jesus, the Living Bread!



