

# Reflection on O Little Town of Bethlehem

The Rev'd. Dr. John Roddam | [www.Pleroma.ca](http://www.Pleroma.ca)

Phillips Brooks (1835 -1893), the much loved Rector of Boston's Trinity Church and also briefly Episcopal Bishop of Massachusetts, penned the well-known Christmas Carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem." This beloved carol culminates with these words in the final stanza –

O holy Child of Bethlehem

Descend to us, we pray

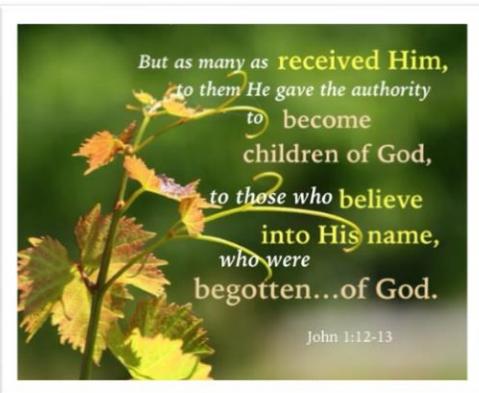
Cast out our sin and enter in,

Be born in us today...

Brooks' carol offers here a significant petition. Carols and hymns are not only poems of the faith but they are often prayers, asking God to do things. Despite the fact that the words of Christian hymns are clear, we often gloss over them as we sing. I had a ministry peer in Seattle who had his parish sing the Creed because he did not believe it... go figure! He said people don't really pay attention to the words they sing!

I describe many of the Church's prayers, especially the weekly collects as being "dangerous." They are asking God to do things - often asking God to CHANGE us! Brooks' carol asks, "Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today."

The traditional Gospel lesson at Christmas reads - He (Jesus) was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. (John 1: 10-13)



When we "receive Jesus" and "believe in His Name" we become Children of God. Human beings, are all made in the "image and likeness" of God (Genesis 1:26). There is a prevalent cultural belief that we are all "Children of God." Some have dubbed this – FOGBOM – "The Fatherhood of God/The Brotherhood of Man" This popular, widely-held belief was coined in none other place than the halls of Harvard Divinity School in the 1960's. However, this does a disservice to our high calling and ignores the costly gift of Jesus' death which wins us this status as Sons & Daughters before our loving Heavenly Father. To become Children of God according to the Biblical witness is a transaction offered through Jesus Christ and in response to Him. This is NOT part of our original nature. We are not intrinsically Children of God! We are called to respond to the grace and mercy of God

expressed in the life and death of Jesus Christ! THEN as we have received Christ and believe (not simply intellectual acquiescence but a change in allegiance and behavior) in Him WE BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD!

To be truly "born of God" means that we have welcomed Jesus into our lives and live for Him. That is what Brooks' simple prayer "Cast out our sin and enter in, be born in us today" denotes.

May He truly be born in each of us this Christmastide!

