



How Far Is It to Bethlehem

We can well imagine that Mary asked this question of Joseph more than once during the long journey on the back of a donkey. Our life journeys bring us to the same words, but in a different context. Mary's asking was a matter of geography. Our asking is a spiritual matter. How far is it from where I am spiritually to the place where Jesus can be born in and into my life? The answer is in the first line of this hymn: "Not very far."

The answer is "not very far" because Jesus comes to us, seeks us out, knocks on our door. The birth of Jesus once again, this time in us, is as close as our inviting him in.

How real is this answer, this "plan of salvation," this life-changing re-birth? The hymn asks the same question, but in artful, metaphorical ways. Will we find a stable room? May we pet the cows and the oxen, and the sheep? Is this transformation going to be something we can feel; something that will touch us, as well? Will we be able to touch Jesus as he reaches out to touch us?

In our very real world during these really difficult times, how real can we expect our Bethlehem experience to be? How far is it to the place of Jesus' birth?

The answer comes flooding in to our consciousness, our awareness. It comes from those sitting next to us in worship and from those whose testimony comes to us down through the ages. The answer is seen in lives so changed they seek to find what they can give, rather than what they can receive, and the giving is done in the name and Spirit of Jesus. They give/gave from their livelihoods, their intellect, their strength and their weakness, their plenty and their lack, their life goals (heart). Changed lives are the answer to how real is all this?

"How far is it to Bethlehem?" is a question that remains, but it is yours to answer.

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