

# PEACE ON EARTH



In March of 1863, 18-year-old Charles Appleton Longfellow left his family’s house in Cambridge, Massachusetts—a colonial mansion that had served as General Washington’s headquarters from 1775 to 1776. Unknown to his family, he boarded a train bound for Washington, D.C., in order to join President Lincoln’s Union army to fight in the Civil War.

Charles was the oldest of six children born to Fannie Elizabeth Appleton and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the celebrated literary critic and poet. Charles had five younger siblings: a brother aged 17 and four sisters ages 13, 10, 8 and one who had died as an infant. Only two years earlier, Charles’s mother Fannie had tragically died after her dress caught on fire. Her husband, Henry, awakened from a nap, tried to extinguish the flames as best he could, but she had already suffered severe burns. She died the next morning on July 10, 1861. Henry Longfellow’s own burns were severe enough that he was unable to attend his wife’s funeral. He stopped shaving on account of the burns, growing a beard that would become associated with his image.

When Charles arrived in Washington D.C., he sought to enlist as a private with the 1st Massachusetts Artillery. Captain W. H. McCartney, commander of Battery A, wrote to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow for written permission for Charles to become a soldier. He granted the permission. On March 27, 1863, Charles was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the 1st Massachusetts Cavalry, assigned to Company “G.”

At the Battle of Chancellorsville in Virginia (April 30–May 6, 1863) he saw no combat duty but spent his time guarding wagons. Charles fell ill with “camp fever” and was sent home to recover for several months with his family. That summer, having missed the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1–3, 1863), he rejoined his unit on August 15, 1863. On the first day of that December, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was dining alone at his home when a telegram arrived with the news that his son had been severely wounded. Charles had been shot through the left shoulder, with the bullet exiting under his right shoulder blade. It had traveled across his back and dangerously nicked his spine.

He was carried into New Hope Church in Orange County, Virginia and then transported to the Rapidan River. Charles’ father and younger brother, Ernest, immediately set out for Washington, D.C., arriving on December 3. Charles arrived by train on December 5. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was alarmed when informed by the army surgeon that his son’s wound “was very serious” and that “paralysis might ensue.”

On Christmas Day 1863, Longfellow a 57-year-old widowed father of six children, the oldest of which had been nearly paralyzed as his country fought a war against itself—wrote a poem seeking to capture the conflict and stress in his own heart and in the world that he observed around him.

As he heard the Christmas bells ringing in Cambridge and the singing of “peace on earth”, taken from the gospel of Luke he was captured by a world of injustice and violence that seemed to scoff at the truthfulness of the Biblical Christmas message. It was then that he wrote the Christmas poem “I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day.”

The theme of listening recurs throughout the poem, and eventually leads to the final verse that ends with the confident hope that even in the midst of bleak despair God is alive and righteousness will ultimately prevail.

In 1872, the poem was put to music by the English organist John Baptiste Calkin for a processional and set to the melody "Waltham."<sup>[1]</sup> Here is Longfellow's now famous poem.

### **I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day<sup>[2]</sup>**

I heard the bells on Christmas Day  
Their old, familiar carols play,  
And wild and sweet  
The words repeat  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And thought how, as the day had come,  
The belfries of all Christendom  
Had rolled along  
The unbroken song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Till ringing, singing on its way,  
The world revolved from night to day,  
A voice, a chime,  
A chant sublime  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

Then from each black, accursed mouth  
The cannon thundered in the South,  
And with the sound  
The carols drowned  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

It was as if an earthquake rent  
The hearth-stones of a continent,  
And made forlorn  
The households born  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!

And in despair I bowed my head;  
"There is no peace on earth," I said;  
"For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:  
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;  
The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men."

[1] Taylor, Justin. "The True Story of Pain and Hope Behind "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day". TGC Blog, December 21, 2014.

[2] Henry Wadsworth Longfellow 1807-1882

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow came to the right conclusion in the last verse. It is the message of Christmas that underscores for mankind the truth that God is far from dead, and he is not asleep! In fact, God is working out all his sovereign purposes in history, in order to deal with sin and evil that entered the world through mankind's rebellion in Eden. Jesus, the promised Redeemer entered into the world to destroy the wrong, to balance the books of injustice and bring true and lasting peace. The peace that Jesus brings is not just a peace on this earth between human beings but ultimately eternal peace with God. In Romans 5:1 we read; "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jesus came on that first Christmas night to a stable in Bethlehem to "save His people from their sins." No doctor in the world can treat or cure sin. Doctors will try to deal with symptoms, and they can even help the sinner live with their sin, but they cannot eradicate this fatal disease. Only Jesus Christ can heal the disease of sin through his atoning sacrifice.

This is what the cross and the resurrection are all about. Christmas is not Christmas without the message of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is why He was born. This was the message of the first Christmas that continues to our day: "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." The Christmas message says that God's grace is greater than our sin. It says that the sin question was answered at the cross. The cross goes as deep as our needs. The cross is the cure—offered, paid for and administered by a loving God in His beloved Son. All those who put their faith in Jesus Christ will be saved and find lasting and eternal peace with their Creator.

Luke 2:14; "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased."

We wish all our clients and friends a Merry Christmas, Happy Holidays, Happy Hanukkah and a Blessed New Year! For our clients, we thank each of you for the trust and confidence you have placed in us to help manage your assets in these chaotic days. I, along with our team, Doretta Amaral, Andrew Cheng, Jesse van de Merwe, Braden VanDyk, Jonathan Wellum Jr. and Jacob Martignago trust that each of you will take time to enjoy family and loved ones during the holiday season. Soli Deo Gloria.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays from your team at  
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