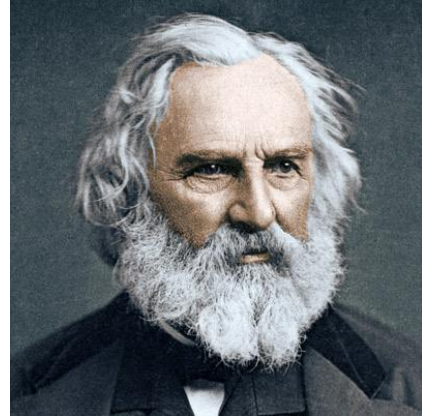


👉 **I HEARD THE BELLS
ON CHRISTMAS DAY 👉
THEN PEALED THE BELLS
MORE LOUD AND DEEP 👉
GOD IS NOT DEAD
NOR DOTH HE SLEEP**

By Henry Wadsworth Longfellow 👉
December 25, 1863



[I sent this out to several people on Christmas Day, 2013 and the favorable response was so huge that I decided to post it on my website! I'm doing so again this year!]

*(At the bottom of the next page is a **LINK** to Ed Herrman performing with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir - the story of Longfellow's Christmas in word and song.)*

Adapted from "Poem conveys the spirit of Christmas"
- Fort Myers News-Press editorial - December 25, 2013

Here is the story behind this lovely and popular Christmas poem and song.

It is difficult to imagine the searing pain of the anguish and the depth of despair that America's all-time favorite poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, was suffering on Christmas day in 1863, 150 years ago today.

And yet, on that day Longfellow wrote a poem that has become an uplifting and joyous Christmas carol, a testament to a deep truth embedded in the meaning of Christmas; that loss can be turned into victory; that hope can flow out of despair.

The poem was almost childlike, another earmark of the spirit of Christmas.

It was first published in a book of Longfellow's poems that was sold to parents who delighted in reading to their children.

The carol the poem produced has such an enticing, lilting melody that many of us have been singing it since childhood while paying scant attention to the deep meaning of the words.

It is "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" and it speaks both of the hard realities of the period and a faith that found a way to transcend those conditions.

Wadsworth's wife, Frances, had died several years earlier in a painfully tragic accident. She was sealing a letter with wax when the wax ignited and the flames ran to her dress. Longfellow rushed to her assistance, but could not extinguish the fire in time to prevent her death.

The tragedy sent Longfellow into a funk, causing him to abandon his poetry for several years.

The Civil War was raging when Wadsworth began to write again. More than 1.3 million young men on both sides were under arms and there had already been half a million of them killed or wounded. One of the wounded was Longfellow's son, Charles, 19.



The first two stanzas speak of the joy and hope of Christmas:

*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.*

*I thought how as the day had come, The belfries of all Christendom,
Had roll'd along through broken song, Of Peace on Earth, good will to men.*

Next came three stanzas, not commonly heard, which describe the transition from peace to war:

*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!*

Then came the stanza of despair, equally drawn from the depths of Longfellow's heart, speaking of the reality in his life:

*And in despair I bow'd 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.'*

In the final stanza, we learn of the victory of the bells over despair:

*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.*

May each one of us enjoy the sounds of hope that transcend the despair of living difficult lives, the ravages of violence and the incivility of mankind: "With peace on earth good will to men." - SB

[HERE](#) is a link to Ed Herrman with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir
– the story of Longfellow's Christmas in word and song.

[Adaptation from original 2013 News-Press editorial was limited to adding the "transition" verses 3 through 5.]