



# BIBLEWAY MINISTRIES

MAKING A DIFFERENCE—THE BIBLE WAY



## 4 Symbols of the Season

**T**he symbols of Christmas are all around us in the month of December as we prepare for Christmas Day. But did you know that long before our Christmas trees, Black Friday specials and our beautiful gift-wrapped presents, God provided His very own symbols?

The first was a manger, which is a place where animals often ate their food. According to the Gospel of Luke (2:7), when Jesus, the Son of God was born in the town of Bethlehem, there was no room for Him in the inn. The hotels, motels and even the bed and breakfasts were all full. As a result, the family was only offered a place among the farm animals. Jesus's mother, Mary, wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in the manger. This symbolized the humility and lowliness of a pauper instead of the pomp associated with royalty.

This symbol became a sign. Angels interrupted the regular nightly broadcast of bleating sheep and snoring shepherds to announce the birth of a Savior, who the shepherds would find in the manger.

As the angels praised God and declared peace and goodwill to all men (Luke 2:9-14), they symbolized the joy and glory of God's salvation plan. The angels also give us a glimpse into their involvement in worshipping and serving God.

The Son of God entered this world as a poor and helpless child. His birth symbolized the fulfillment of the prophecy found in Micah 5:2 which said, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." Isaiah said, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call

his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

While millions of stars beautifully light our sky at night, God launched a special star that stood out above the others. It became a GPS for wise men from afar. The star not only provided physical guidance, but it also provided a symbol of the light and hope Jesus brought to a dark world. Paul said in Galatians 4:4, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son."

For many, the visual representations of Christmas are wonderful symbols. Nevertheless, beyond these symbols is the Gift of Christmas, God's only begotten Son! John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Jesus is so much better than the best day-after-Thanksgiving deals offered by Macy's, Best Buy and all the rest; for if you receive Him today, this can be the Deal of a Lifetime! In the angels' words, He promises, "On earth peace, goodwill toward men." (Luke 2:14) It is hard to wrap our arms around such a peace in turbulent times. Yet in our darkest nights we, too, like the shepherds can receive His peace.

- Dr. L.W. Edwards



# The Best Christmas Song Ever

Some of the best Christmas music invites us to listen. In "Do You Hear What I Hear?", a lamb invites a shepherd boy to listen to a song high above the trees, then a king pleads with his subjects to listen to his message about a Child sleeping in the night. "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" invites us to hearken (listen) as angels sing of a newborn King and peace on earth. The first line of "Winter Wonderland" asks if we are listening to sleigh bells. Each song is upbeat and pleasant. It is joyful. Festive. Hopeful, even. As we listen, the lyrics cheer our hearts.

Yet sometimes brokenness around us and within us plays another song in our ears that drowns out the sounds of the season. Its jarring notes of grief, pain, sorrow and despair play like a soundtrack on repeat, reminding us of all that is wrong with our world.

We can sense these dueling melodies of joy and sadness in the lyrics to Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's famous poem set to music, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." Only when we consider the tragic events in the poet's life do the words begin to make sense: Within three years, he had lost his second wife to an accident, the American Civil War had begun and his oldest son, Charles, had been severely injured in the war. The first tragedy pierced his heart like a dagger. Each new hardship twisted the blade in the wound.

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!"

Can you feel the heaviness in Longfellow's heart? Listen long enough to the melody of today's headlines, and your heart will likewise sink as they mock the song of peace on earth.

Surprisingly, Longfellow's tone changed in the final verse:

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."

His despair had turned to hope and his sorrow to joy — but not because anything in his life had changed. His wife was still dead. His son was still recovering from his injuries. His country was still in turmoil.

Amid the gloom of the present, the poet heard the faint melody of another song. Slowly but steadily, it rang like the church bells outside his home. Louder and stronger it grew until it overpowered the other melodies which had weighed him down. It was the song of Hope. "God is not dead; nor doth He sleep!" The sovereign God was alive and well and ruling from His Heavenly throne. Hope had come to stay in Longfellow's heart.

This hope was based on his faith in God. Yes, evil was winning for now, but hope reminded him the wrong would eventually fail. Yes, all that seemed good was failing, but hope reminded him the right would eventually prevail. Listening to the song of hope gave him assurance peace would come to earth, beginning within his own heart. It was the best song ever.

Perhaps the refrains of joy and sadness are competing for your attention this Christmas. You want to remember the birth of Christ, celebrate the season and all its festivities, but your rational brain is telling you there is nothing to celebrate. Perhaps the thought of celebrating something that happened so long ago seems foolish in light of recent hardships and losses.

When your heart (or your circumstances or current events) tells you to give up hope, don't listen to it. Instead tell your heart about the God of Hope. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." (Romans 15:13) Joy and peace can be yours because the God of Hope is alive and well. Someday He will bring everlasting peace to the world. Trust Him like Longfellow and He can bring peace to your heart today.

Enjoy this [beautiful rendition of Longfellow's hymn](#).

- Cam Edwards

