



Friday, 12/9/16

PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN

READING: Luke 2:8-14

Last year I experienced the Christmas blues. Deployment coupled with grieving my grandfather's death weighed heavily on me, so much so, that I often longed for peace. To lift my spirits, I would listen to Christmas carols. One in particular, Burl Ives' version of "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" always turned my blues into a resolute serenity. This Christmas carol is based on the 1863 poem "Christmas Bells" by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The song tells of Longfellow's despair upon hearing Christmas bells that "hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men." The carol concludes with the bells carrying renewed hope for peace on earth and good will to men.

Here's the rest of the story behind "Christmas Bells." During the American Civil War, Longfellow's oldest son, Charles Longfellow, joined the Union cause as a soldier without his father's blessing. Charles soon got an appointment as a lieutenant but in November he was severely wounded in the Battle of New Hope Church (in Virginia), during the Mine Run Campaign. Combined with the recent loss of his wife, Frances, who died as a result of an accidental fire, Longfellow was inspired to write, "Christmas Bells."

May we be inspired by Longfellow's "Christmas Bells" and may our hope be rekindled as we await the coming of the Christ child anew. For during the Christmastime blues, it is my prayer that we would experience Christ's peace and sing, "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.'"

-CH (MAJ) Shawn Gee