

--Written for Burgess Falls, TN Ward 2007

SONG: I HEARD THE BELLS ON CHRISTMAS DAY

"Peace on earth, good will to men." These words echo the thoughts and hopes in many of our hearts today. If there were an official motto for this Christmas season, that might well be it: "Peace on earth, good will to men." But Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the author of those lyrics didn't make up that phrase. Those words are part of a story that began a long time ago.

More than 2,700 years ago, the prophet Isaiah declared: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

SONG: IT CAME UPON THE MIDNIGHT CLEAR (207) -- Congregation

On the American continent, King Benjamin said, "For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent ... shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay... He shall suffer temptations, and pain. ... And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall he called Mary" (Mosiah 3:5, 7-8).

On the eve of His birth, the voice of the Lord came to Nephi, saying, "Lift up your head and be of good cheer; for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to show unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets"(3 Nephi 1:13).

And true to the prophecy, that night on the other side of the world, Joseph and his espoused wife Mary were in Bethlehem, having traveled from Galilee to the City of David.

SONG: O HOLY NIGHT -- Choir

In the 2nd chapter of Luke we read: "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:5-7).

SONG: AWAY IN A MANGER -- Primary

While Mary and Joseph were wrapped up in what is the most personal and miraculous event of a young couples' life — there were others in the area experiencing their own miracles regarding the sacred birth.

The Book of Luke continues the story: "And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host

praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:8—14).

SONG: THE FIRST NOEL (213) -- Congregational

"And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another. Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass. which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste. and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger” (Luke 2:15-16).

The shepherds came, “with haste,” and found the Savior lying in a manger. He was right where the angels told them He would be. These shepherds were told to find Jesus in much the same way that we are told to find Jesus. We are given commandments and asked to follow Him. But to “follow Him,” we first must find him.

In the Book of Matthew, chapter 25, we read: “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee? Or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt. 25:31, 34-40).

SONG: FAR, FAR AWAY ON JUDEA'S PLAIN

More than just shepherds were seeking the Christ Child. There were Wise Men who had anxiously been waiting the sign of His birth. These were men of wealth and stature who desired to present Him with gifts and worship Him.

In the 2 chapter of Matthew we find: "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. ... and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” (Matthew 2:1-2, 9-11)

SONG: SILENT NIGHT

Since the time of the wise men, President Monson said, “the spirit of giving gifts has been present in the mind of each Christian as he or she commemorates the Christmas season. Our Heavenly Father gave to us His Son, Jesus Christ. That precious Son gave to us His life, the Atonement, and victory over the grave” (Ensign, Feb. 1997).

What will you and I give for Christmas this year?

Just as the Wise Men came from afar to bring precious gifts, it is possible for us to do the same. We may not travel the physical distances they did. Our “traveling” will be in the stretching of our souls—in our growing capacity to love as He would have us love, to do as He would have us do, and to live as He would have us live. Our journey isn’t a physical trek over dusty hills and roads; it is an emotional and spiritual pilgrimage. The end result is the same: we present the best we have to offer to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

President Monson further taught, “‘We make a living by what we get, but we build a life by what we give.’ Giving, not getting, brings to full bloom the Christmas spirit. Enemies are forgiven, friends remembered, and God obeyed. The spirit of Christmas illuminates the picture window of the soul, and we look out upon the world’s busy life and become more interested in people than things. To catch the real meaning of the spirit of Christmas, we need only drop the last syllable, and it becomes the spirit of Christ” (New Era, Dec. 1986).

SONG: OH, COME, ALL YE FAITHFUL (202) -- Congregation

President James E. Faust reminds us, “You have heard it said that the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried. At the heart of the message of the Savior of the world is a single, glorious, wonderful, still largely untried concept. In its simplest terms the message is that we should seek to overcome the selfishness we all seem to be born with, that we should overcome human nature and think of others before self. We should think of God and serve Him, and think of others and serve them” (Ensign, Dec. 1999).

In doing so we will find the peace and joy our Heavenly Father wants us to have. In 2 Nephi 2:25 we read, “men are that they might have joy.” The Savior’s humble entrance into the world made this joy possible.

SONG: JOY TO THE WORLD

President Monson said, “Born in a stable, cradled in a manger, He came forth from heaven to live on earth as mortal man and to establish the kingdom of God. During His earthly ministry, He taught men the higher law. His glorious gospel reshaped the thinking of the world” (G.C., Oct. 2002).

The world’s political climate may continue to be volatile and changing, but we have been promised that through Jesus Christ we can experience peace in our lives. The true spirit of Christmas is that spirit of peace—the spirit of Christ.

(John 14:27) “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

(John 16: 33) “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer I have overcome the world.”

“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’” (hymn 214).

C. SONG: HARK! THE HERALD ANGELS SING (209) -- Congregation