

## CHRISTMAS IS COMING

Christmas seems to have snuck up on me this year. I have been basically housebound since a fall the Tuesday before Thanksgiving. I have done my shopping online and now am worried about how I will get the packages inside when they come. I have given up on the notion of Christmas Cards because the cards left from last year are stored downstairs and I can't do stairs and cannot get to the store. I have an advent wreath with candles out and a manger scene. The manger figures were stored on the first level and a friend got it out for me. I won't have a tree up unless I make a pain free recovery soon. One thing I can do, besides shop online, is enjoy the Christmas music. My favorite hymn is one that is not often sung. It is "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." The words speak to me of the times it was written, the Civil War, and the times we are in now. The writer's son had been wounded in the Civil War, his beloved wife had died in a fire two years before and he had been burned trying to save her. As Henry Wadsworth Longfellow sat listening to the bells pealing from a nearby church, he poured out his sorrow in his words. "I heard the bells on Christmas Day, their old familiar carols play of peace on earth, goodwill 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." The words reflected his grief and loss. But then he finished the song with, "God is not dead nor doth he sleep. The wrong shall fail, the right prevail with peace on earth, good will to men." He wrote a poem of sorrow and salvation. It was set to music in 1872 and then in 1956 it was recorded by Bing Crosby with music composed by Johnny Marks. It is a sad hymn that then becomes a reminder that despite our sorrows, God is with us. My hope for all of us is that when we sing those old hymns like Away in the Manger we will think of those without shelter, that when we sing O Come All Ye Faithful we think of those who are searching for God, and that when we sing Hark The Herald Angels Sing we remember that all are welcome at the table and with each song remember that our hymns call us to faith, to love, and to service. May we welcome Jesus remembering his love for us and may we show that love to each of his children.

Luke 2:4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went there to register with Mary who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born and she gave birth to her first born, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in w manger because there was no room for them in the Inn.

Lord, we thank you for the gift of Jesus. Be with us in this holy season, may we see beyond the ribbons and gifts and know the true meaning of the birth of Christ and your gift to us with his life. Lord, be with those who are ill and those who grieve in our midst. Be with our church, may it be your church. Bless our Pastor and keep him in your care. Be with his family. Be with our staff and leaders, bless their service. May we be grateful for what we have, and may we serve others who have less in your name always with mercy and love. May all we do be pleasing to you. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Grace Epperson

