

## ***Hear the Angels Sing***

Sunday December 24<sup>th</sup> is a bit unusual for the church calendar. It is both the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent and Christmas Eve, the Nativity of our Lord. We will celebrate the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent at our 10 AM worship service and make our final preparations for celebrating Christ's birth. The Gospel (Luke 1: 26-28) for the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent tells of the angel Gabriel's visit to Mary, the mother of Jesus; this event is often referred to as the Annunciation or announcement by the archangel to Mary that she would conceive and bear a son through a virgin birth and become the mother of Jesus, the Son of God, marking the Incarnation—the Word made flesh).

The final hymn we sing for this Advent season is "***It Came Upon a Midnight Clear***". The text of this poignant hymn, written in 1849, was a Christmas poem written by Edmund Sears (1810-1876), a Unitarian parish minister in Wayland MA. Sears wrote *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* during a time of personal melancholy. He had recently suffered a breakdown, struggled in his faith, and was troubled by events in the world at that time. The US was at war with Mexico and much of Europe was in turmoil of revolution and unrest. He struggled with the dark world, "full of sin and strife" and not "hearing the Christian message." The troubled context found in the song was inspired by the turbulent times in which he lived.

Sears' text is remarkable as a Christmas hymn or carol, for its focus not on Bethlehem, but on his own time, and on the contemporary issue of war and peace. It doesn't focus on the holy family, but rather on the song of the angels. ( Luke 2:14 the angels say "Peace on the Earth, good will to men."). There is no specific mention of Christ's birth, but there is allusion to a glorious King and a new age. *It Came Upon a Midnight Clear* is considered to be the first Christmas carol composed in the United States.

Surely Edmund Sears would be worried about the state of affairs in the world today! Wars and turmoil abound in the world around us. Our nation is divided, if not literally, figuratively, pitting neighbor against neighbor, protestors against proponents, and faiths against faiths. Social media, television and the internet bombard us with warnings and alarms that we are in the midst of "*unprecedented* and perilous times. We need a break from it all—we need Christmas! This season of Christmas, full of hope, reminds us all of the Savior who was born so long ago. He didn't stay in the manger but gave His very life for YOU and ME and one day soon we will reign with Him and the "*whole world give back the song which now the angels sing*".

There was much to be hopeful for then, the angels were bringing a message of good cheer! Share the angels' message—the Good News, instead of messages of doom and gloom. There is much to be hopeful for NOW—in our time. . . Jesus Christ is about to return for His Bride, the Church. *For lo, the days are hastening on!* May you find peace in Jesus even though the world around us is in crazy chaos. *Rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.*

***Come and hear the angels sing!***

***Sunday morning worship 10 AM***

***Christmas Eve Candlelight service Sunday 7 PM***

***Christmas Day service of lessons and carols Monday 10 AM***

1. *It came upon the midnight clear,  
That glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth  
To touch their harps of gold;  
"Peace on the earth, good will to men  
From heaven's all-gracious King"—  
The world in solemn stillness lay*

*To hear the angels sing.*

*3. But with the woes of sin and strife  
The world has suffered long;  
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled  
Two thousand years of wrong;  
And man, at war with man, hears not  
The love song which they bring; –  
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,  
And hear the angels sing!*

*5. For lo! the days are hastening on  
By prophet bards foretold,  
When, with the ever circling years  
Shall come the age of gold;  
When Peace shall over all the earth,  
Its ancient splendors fling,  
And the whole world gives back the song,  
Which now the angels sing*