



### Third Weekend in Advent

The season of Advent, from the Latin word 'adventus' which means 'coming,' begins four weeks prior to Christmas. During Advent, Christians expectantly wait for the nativity of Jesus, anticipate His second coming, and wait with hope for the peace on earth that the angels announced to the shepherds on the night of the first Christmas.

### Luke 2:8–14 (KJV)

*And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. <sup>11</sup> For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. <sup>12</sup> And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

*<sup>13</sup> And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, <sup>14</sup> Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.*

### When Christmas Was ILLEGAL

In the early centuries of Christianity there was no consensus concerning the date of Jesus' birth. Early Christians contended the actual date was May 20, April 18, April 19, May 28, January 2, November 17, November 20, March 12 and March 25. The church finally settled on December 25, not believing the date was accurate, but that this would be the day chosen to mark Jesus' birth.

### Why December 25?

1. The Romans celebrated a pagan holiday on that day called Saturnalia. It honored the Roman god, Saturn, and it was the most popular celebration in Roman times.
2. Under the calendar used at the time, December 25 marked the Winter Solstice. It was the date when the night was longest and from that point the days grew lighter.

*In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* John 1:4–5 (NIV)

For the Puritans in England, the celebration of Christmas was seen to be about drinking and revelry and very little about a holy day of Jesus' birth.

Puritans decided it best to ignore Christmas altogether. It would be just another day. When the Puritans arrived at Plymouth Rock in December 1620, they observed the Sabbath on Sunday, but on Christmas, they went to work. Anyone who "kept Christmas" became an outcast and was persecuted. The colony of Massachusetts outlawed Christmas on May 11, 1659.

## **It Came Upon A Midnight Clear**

The song was written by Edmund Hamilton Sears in 1849 in Weston, Massachusetts. Sears was the pastor of the First Unitarian Church. Although Christmas was no longer illegal, it was not celebrated, nor was it a holiday. Edmund Sears was on the forefront of a movement to introduce Christmas to America as a national holiday.

Events in the U.S. preceding in 1849:

- Cherokee "Trail of Tears"
- The Mexican War
- The Texas Revolution

Events directly affecting Edmund Sears in Massachusetts:

- Child labor laws
- Slavery

Why did Edmund Sears want to promote Christmas?

1. Jesus cares for the least, last, lonely and lost
2. Jesus came to bring peace on earth and all Christians ought to be working toward that end until the day Christ returns

## **It Came Upon A Midnight Clear – The Song**

It came upon a 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

And ye, beneath life's crushing load whose forms are bending low

Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow

Look now! For glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing

O rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing

Yet with the woes of sin and strife the world hath 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

For lo! the days are hastening on, by prophet seen of old

When, with the ever-circling years, shall come the time foretold

When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors fling

And the whole world send back the song which now the angels sing.