

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

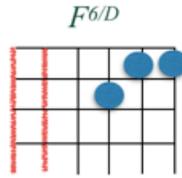
Poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow December 25, 1863; music by John Baptiste Calkin 1872

C *Dm* *G7*
I heard the bells on Christmas day.

C *Am7* *Dm* *G7*
Their old familiar carols play,

Em *Am* *F6/D* *Fmaj7* *F*
And wild and sweet the words repeat,

C *G7* *C*
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men.



C *Dm* *G7*
Then from each black, accursed mouth,

C *Am7* *Dm* *G7*
The cannon thundered in the South,

Em *Am* *F6/D* *Fmaj7* *F*
And with the sound the carols drowned,

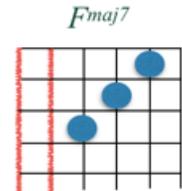
C *G7* *C*
Of peace on earth, goodwill on men.

C *Dm* *G7*
I thought how, as the day had come,

C *Am7* *Dm* *G7*
The belfries of all Christendom;

Em *Am* *F6/D* *Fmaj7* *F*
Had rolled along th'unbroken song,

C *G7* *C*
Of peace on earth, goodwill on men.



C *Dm* *G7*
It was as if an earthquake rent;

C *Am7* *Dm* *G7*
The hearth-stones of a continent,

Em *Am* *F6/D* *Fmaj7* *F*
And made forlorn, the households born,

C *G7* *C*
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men.

C *Dm* *G7*
And in despair I bowed my head:

C *Am7* *Dm* *G7*
"There is no peace on earth," I said,

Em *Am* *F6/D* *Fmaj7* *F*
"For hate is strong and mocks the song,

C *G7* *C*
Of peace on earth, goodwill to men.

C *Dm* *G7*
Then peeled the bells more loud and deep:

C *Am7* *Dm* *G7*
God is not dead, nor doth He sleep:

Em *Am* *F6/D* *Fmaj7* *F*
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,

C *G7* *C*
Of peace on earth, goodwill on men.

C *Dm* *G7*
Till ringing, singing on its way,

C *Am7* *Dm* *G7*
The world revolved from night to day.

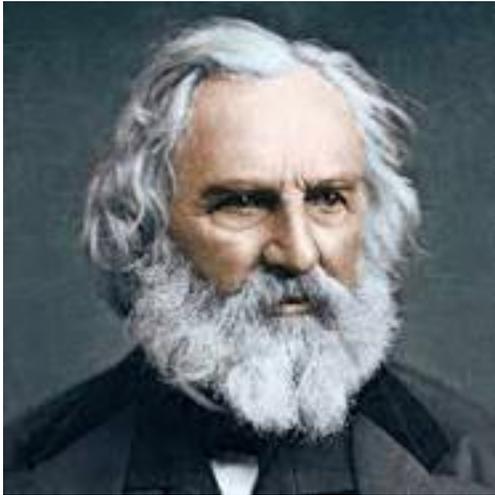
Em *Am* *F6/D* *Fmaj7* *F*
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime,

C *G7* *C*
Of peace on earth, goodwill on men.

Christmas as you go

History

“I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day” is by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow who is viewed as one of the greatest, if not the greatest American poet. In addition he was a college professor, and writer.



Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
Image from www.biography.com/.

Longfellow suffered great sorrow with the loss of two loved wives and the wounding of his oldest son in the civil war.

As he tended his son’s injuries, saw other wounded soldiers on Cambridge’s streets, and visited with families who had lost sons in battle, he asked his friends and God, “Where is the Peace?”

The ringing of Christmas bells may have inspired the cadence found in his writing from December 25, 1863. One can easily sense Longfellow’s views on

slavery and the evils that surround war in the first verses. The final two verses however ring out with his faith in God’s ability to overcome the worst of man’s behavior. The poem inspired the Union and soon the whole world.

Almost ten years later, in 1872, an Englishman named John Baptiste Calkin married music to Longfellow’s Christmas poem. The organist and music teacher wrote a melody that contained the power to not only convey the bleak imagery of Longfellow’s sadness in the poem’s tormented first few verses, but the poet’s deep and abiding faith in the ode’s exhilarating conclusion.



John Baptiste Calkin
Image from Writers Secrets.

<http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2014/12/21/the-story-of-pain-and-hope-behind-i-heard-the-bells-on-christmas-day/>

Christmas as you go