

Grace and Peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Joy to the World – Let Heaven and Nature Sing! The Christian tradition of bells began in 400 AD when introduced by Paulinus of Nola. Paulinus was a poet and Roman Senator who attained the position of ‘consul’; the highest elected office in the Roman government. He would later become baptized in the Christian faith and in 604 AD; Pope Sabinian officially sanctioned the use of bells in the Christian Church.

Soon after the incorporation of bells within the church, they began to fulfill a holy purpose. The bells were blessed: washed with holy water, anointed with oil, and fumed with a censer, while prayers were offered. After their consecration, their purpose of calling the faithful to worship, protecting the church from storms, driving out demons (and keeping them away) was commenced.

Over the centuries, the church bells spread throughout Europe ‘first’, then made their way across the globe as Christianity expanded and grew. Bells would chime to gather people to worship, celebrate holy days and weddings, and to honor the dead in ways that spoke to an entire community. A special tradition of ringing the church bells at 6:00 am, 12:00 noon, and 6:00 pm was a call for all the faithful to stop and recite the Lord’s Prayer. (The Islamic faith has a parallel tradition that calls for times of prayer during the day.)

The church bells are composed primarily of copper and tin; with copper being an abundant element and tin being considerably scarcer. When copper and tin are combined it is called bronze. Research has revealed that bells cast in bronze create the most pleasing tones.

The church bells played an important role in the church with their unique sound and proclamation. Their voices joined ours in the celebrations and sorrows we endure as a church. In the last 50 years, the sounds of bells ringing from church steeples have been silenced greatly. Technology and advances in communication has replaced the need for bells to ‘inform’. Furthermore, neighbors complain and take legal action against churches to where the bells have simply been abandoned due to the financial risks that churches face.

The bells in the church are as fundamental as the very design, symbols, and character of our Christian tradition, and yet...we have allowed this feature in our church home to disappear. Modern church architecture often does not account for a bell tower as a means to save money. As a result of declining bell usage, many bell manufactures are also disappeared, leaving this a ‘dying form of art’. Today, instead of purchasing a newly cast bell, congregations seeking to renew this tradition will elect to purchase a used or restored bell, giving the bell itself a new life and allowing its story and functions within the church to continue.

Joy to the world – let heaven and nature sing. My friends, when bells ring at Christmas or any other time of year, their voices (the sounds of nature) join with ours to proclaim the greatness, glory, and mercy of God. Nature does indeed sing the praises of our God along with us! The mighty pipe organs in the church create the most magnificent sounds from the most humble elements on our earth; pipes constructed from wood, tin, and lead. You see, it is not gold, silver, platinum or precious gems; it is the most humble elements that produce the richest and purest sounds of praise to join with our voices in grateful and sincere thanksgiving for all our gracious God has done for us through His beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Tonight we celebrate the anniversary of our Saviour’s birth; the time when heaven opened up and came to earth; the time when the angels first shared their song of praise to God with us, so we might join then ‘and all nature’ in the hymn that will never end and never cease praising our Heavenly Father.

The church bells may be disappearing and pipe organs are being replaced by digital technology; but my very dear friends in Christ, it the Spirit within you that gives voice to the greatest praise heaven and earth can offer because our Lord Jesus Christ has made our voice ‘holy, welcomed and worthy’ before God!

Tonight we remember, reflect, and celebrate the promise of God that a Saviour would be born to redeem His people. We are reminded that among the most humble people and elements; we find the most pure, holy, and perfect praise. What starts, as a humble and silent night will change heaven and earth forever with a joy that will fill eternity; with a peace, love, and rest that will be given to all God’s people.

2000 years ago, God opened the eyes of the humble shepherds in the field and allowed them to see the realms of heaven, allowed them to hear the angels singing, allowed them to receive the message of ‘**Peace to all people of the Earth**’. The birth of Christ is the fulfillment of the prophecy of a Savior and the words of Peace on Earth are also a prophecy and proclamation that our Holy Spirit is actively working to completely fulfill in the world today.

When our Lord comes again, the work of the Spirit to bring the complete peace to all on the Earth will be fulfilled; and the sin, suffering, and decay will have all ended and passed away. That day is not here yet, we are still being called to participate in the work before us, and our rest is not yet won. Until our Lord comes again, and while our work continues, may our voices ring ‘loud and clear’ joining with all elements in ‘heaven and nature’ to perfectly praise our God.

God is revealing His divine plan of love, compassion, and peace for each of us through the gift of faith and believing. My Christmas prayer for all of us this year of that we might humble ourselves so others may see *more perfectly* the love of God through Jesus Christ *reflected and revealed* in our lives.

Where is the Christmas message in all this with bells my friends? It is completely and entirely with you. You see, in as much as the copper is abundant and the tin is not; there is an abundance of people in the world that are waiting for a rare and precious element to be added to their life. They are in fact waiting for the gift of knowledge and understanding of their very own precious Savior. They are waiting for the gift of faith to open their eyes to reveal God’s story of love, hope, peace, and joy for them.

As much as God sent His Son into the world to redeem us all; so God continues to send us into the world my friends, so we will continue telling, sharing, and proclaiming the Good News and the beautiful story of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit has equipped us with the tools, gifts, and blessings to change the tone of the world around us and collectively offer worship and praise that is pleasing to God.

We may not hear the bells at Christmas anymore, but nature cannot be silenced and will proclaim the greatness of God with, ‘all heaven and earth’ and ‘all creatures great and small’. All voices will join together because of what God has done for us on this most holy night we call Christmas Eve.

Glory to God in the highest; and on earth, the peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Saviour and Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit; One God now and forever, Amen!