

SILENT NIGHT

*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.*
—Luke 1:68



One of my favorite Christmas carols begins with the following gentle lyric: “Still, still, still, one can hear the falling snow.” There are not many places left where silence reigns supreme, but the night of Christmas Eve may still be such a refuge if we will preserve it. Our faith is built on paradox. Life comes in the midst of death, light shines in the deepest darkness, and God’s Word is definitively uttered on a *Silent Night*. In the lovely French carol, *Bring a Torch*, the lyricist urges the Bethlehem faithful to observe this holy silence: “It is wrong when the child is sleeping, it is wrong to talk so loud.” The poet knows what dreams may come when the Messiah is allowed to “sleep in heavenly peace:” “Hush! Hush! See how he smiles in dreams!” We certainly know what the Christ child is dreaming of—justice for the poor, healing for the sick, hope for the lost, and love for the lonely.

Activity: Sit quietly by the tree at bedtime and observe a moment of silence for the hopes and dreams of the world. Then let each person share a personal hope or dream for the world.

Prayer: Word of God, in silence you are spoken, in stillness you are heard, and in peace you are once more born among us.

RING CHRISTMAS BELLS

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the
messenger who brings good news, who announces salvation.*
—Isaiah 52:7



When I was growing up, there was a church on the corner that tolled its bells every Sunday and Christmas day. Our Christmas carols are filled with bells: *The Carol of the Bells*, *Jingle Bells*, and *Silver Bells*. Bells are traditional ways of setting a tone of solemnity, calling us to service, celebrating the end of war, and ringing in the New Year with hope. In *The Polar Express*, only the lead character retains the childlike faith to hear the sweet sound of Santa’s sleigh bell as he grows older. When Prince William and Katherine were married in London this year, church bells tolled for a full three hours afterward. Yet, Christmas marks an even more historic marriage—the wedding of heaven to earth, the union of God and humanity. Let us rejoice today as bells toll our freedom in Christ, our service to the gospel, and the hope reflected in Longfellow’s poem, *I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*: “Peace on earth, good will to all.”

Activity: Ring your bell ornaments and any other bells or chimes you have this morning to celebrate the new day of Christ’s birth.

Prayer: Loving Father, we celebrate the bells of Christmas Day, for they joyfully proclaim your coming and the promise of peace.