



* “LISTENING FOR THE BELLS TO RING

Biblical Text: [Luke 2:1-17](#)

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*It’s Christmas Eve. I don’t think that’s a surprise to you! And here we are in this beautiful Sanctuary together! And, with a little help from our ushers, we have a simple gift for each one of you – *a Christmas Bell. *(Yes, now’s the time to pass them out!)*

I know, I know, “*Jingle Bells*” isn’t *really* a Christmas carol... But it’s part of Christmas, isn’t it? Just like us. And I think God takes us as we are. Thank God! *And several people have said, “*Dr. Mike – are you really wanting to give out bells? How are you going to keep children from ringing them?*” Here’s my answer, “*I don’t intend to! After all, bells are for ringing!*” It’s hard not to be joyous at the sound of a bell.

Sometimes we try! I can’t help but share again about the cold Saturday morning I was ringing bells with my *Rotary Club when a guy came by who had too much “*the night before,*” and said, “*Buddy, I’ll give you \$20 if you’ll stop ringing that darn bell.*”

*I suppose I could be in trouble tomorrow, like Ann and I were a few years ago when, with our other presents, we sent our granddaughter a Christmas bell. She loved it so much that, well, I’ll let you just see for yourselves. **(play clip)* She played it all day long!

I suppose it is possible to have too much cowbell, or Christmas bell!

But there is something about bells that calls for our attention. Whether it is church bells, hand bells, jingle bells, or clock bells that chime the hour, we mostly like them.

On my way to Church this evening, several times, over traffic, I could hear Church bells ringing. It’s amazing how far their sound can be heard, often for many miles. Bells sound as if they are saying, “*Listen to my message!*” **Bells are for ringing!**

Some of you who are Biblically astute will no doubt remind me that there are no bells in the Christmas story. And, of course, you are right. But there are other things omitted there that we include every year. Like donkeys – I’ve checked - no mention of a *donkey shaggy and brown. Or *camels, or *Kings for that matter. All Matthew 2 mentions are “Magi” *meaning “astrologers” rather than “wise men,” or kings.

So why shouldn’t there be bells? Luke 2:13-14 says: * “*Suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, *‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!’*”¹

¹ Luke 2:13-14, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*. Copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

So, were there harps to accompany the *angels singing, "*Gloria in Excelsis?*" The text doesn't say. It doesn't even say they were singing, but we imagine they were, don't we? So, I choose to believe there could have been bells ringing the first Christmas so long ago to announce Jesus' birth with joy in the heavens and on the earth!

And this Christmas, whenever you hear a bell, I hope you won't think first of angels getting their wings, like the old movie. * Instead, I hope you'll remember why we still celebrate the good news of great joy. *In all the giving and receiving of Christmas, I hope you'll do your part to "*ring the bells*" and share the good news for all to hear.

From time to time, we forget, like children who have grown too old in adulthood, in the childhood book and movie, the * "*Polar Express*," that we lose, or stop believing in the magical, amazing good news of Christmas. But most of us have remnants of Christmas joy that stay with us. *After all, we are here tonight.

We are because something in Christmas has called us - and like the shepherds in Luke 2, verse fifteen, we have said, * "*Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.*"² And here we are. And I believe, whatever age we may be, Christmas still has something to give us.

*If you ask a child what they enjoy most about Christmas, probably at the top of their list will be gifts underneath the Christmas tree. Now at this stage of life, like many of you, there is nothing I really need, except the things that cannot be purchased.

But I do remember Christmas Eves and Christmas Days - past and present. I particularly remember the Christmas of 1962, now a long time ago. *Christmas was a big deal when I was a kid. And I still love it today. I awoke that Christmas morning to the sound of train whistles and clanging bells.

And I remember my father's joy, and mine, as I ran down the stairs to see a *Lionel train set under the Christmas tree with train whistles and crossing bells. Now nearly fifty-five years later, I still remember the sound. The train set's whistle and crossing bell was the sound of my mother and father's unconditional love for me.

It was many years later that I understood the gift my parent gave had its source in God's gift of his Son for all of us. And now, for me, the sound of the train whistle and the song of the angels, and Christmas bells has all come together as one.

They are the all the signs of God's incredible love. And here tonight in this beautiful Sanctuary, we sing and listen, and wait, maybe impatiently to *light the candles. And every now and then in the background, it brings me joy to hear a Christmas bell ring!

² Ibid. Luke 2:15, *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

And I can't help think of others who are waiting to hear or see the joy of Christmas. It's not been any easy fall or an easy year for many. It never is!

*First Church, Coffeyville, where I served as pastor years ago, was an old stately brick building with a big bell tower from which carillon bells chimed the hour Christmas carols rang in the season. It was the most visible of the Churches in town.

And late one Christmas eve, they came. Not through the big red doors at the top of the stairs, or into the lobby by the big spruce tree. *But across the empty lot where a playground thankfully now stands. They were on the road, travelers, cold, tired, and in need of everything. And we did ... what Churches do.

*We provided food at the McDonalds nearby. Blankets and coats. A night's shelter. And I said to them, *"I'm glad we could help. So, how did you happen to find us this Christmas Eve?"* And they said, *"We heard your Church bells ring."*

Sharing our blessings with them became God's Christmas blessing to me, and every year, every time I think of it, in my heart, I can hear the Church bells ring.

And in every act of love, every moment of generosity, every child's tender smile, every time we share the love of Christ, they keep on ringing.

*You each have a bell. Would you hold it in your hand? Will you see what you have to offer to a world waiting for Good News? And, will you hear this invitation?

*"A bell's not a bell till you ring it. A song's not a song till you sing it. I still believe what wise men say. Love isn't love 'till you give it away."*³

Now, ring the bells. Sing the song of Christmas. Give it away! Amen. *

³ Bill Anderson's country song, based the earlier lyrics in 1959 by Oscar Hammerstein, from *"The Sound of Music."*