

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear
By
Bill Dagle

Edmund Sears was born on April 6, 1810, in Sandisfield, Massachusetts. In the next 66 years, he would graduate from Union College in Schenectady, New York, receive a doctor's degree from Harvard and pastor three small churches in Wayland, Lancaster and Weston, Massachusetts. He died in 1876 and would have been forgotten by most except for one little detail.

In 1846, he penned a Christmas poem, entitled *Peace on Earth*, and put it in his desk because of the non-acceptance of a previous Christmas hymn he had written entitled *Calm on the Listening Ears of Night* in 1834. *Peace on Earth* would stay in his desk for the next three years, but God had a plan. The country preacher was destined to be remembered for that poem.

Pastor Sears could have served the metropolitan pulpits of Boston, but he had grown up in the Berkshire Hills and loved the small town way of life. The country setting and changing seasons gave writing inspiration from long summer days to cold winter nights.

Could it be that on one of those cold New England nights, looking through a frost laden window, he saw with his mind's eye a scene of long ago—the coming of the angels to a Judean hillside, the shepherds struck with fear and the message from Heaven's all-gracious King, "Peace on earth, good will to men"? Together, all of this would give birth to the poem, *Peace on Earth*.

Time and dust would have swallowed Pastor Sears' poem; but in 1849, he sent *Peace on Earth* to the publisher of Boston's *Christian Register*. A year went by until finally, for Christmas of 1850, the poem was put in print for all to see. It would be Richard Willis, a graduate of Yale and music critic for the New York Tribune, who would give flight to the words by adding music. Years later, Oliver Wendell Holmes declared the new hymn as "one of the finest and most beautiful ever written."

The hymn is still as beautiful as ever, and the message all the more needed. Today, we sing Edmund Sears' Christmas poem of peace under the title of *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*.