

## IT CAME UPON THE MIDNIGHT CLEAR Worksheet

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### *Verse 1*

It came upon the midnight clear, that glorious song of old,  
From angels bending near the earth, to touch their harps of gold;  
“Peace on the earth, good will to men, from heaven’s all  
gracious King.”  
The world in solemn stillness lay, to hear the angels sing.

### *Verse 2*

Still through the cloven skies they come with peaceful  
wings unfurled,  
And still their heavenly music floats over all the weary  
world;  
Above its sad and lowly plains, they bend on hovering  
wing,  
And ever over its Babel sounds the blessed angels sing.

### *Verse 3*

But with the woes of sin and strife the world has suffered  
long;  
Beneath the angel strain have rolled two thousand years of  
wrong;  
And man, at war with man, hears not the love song which  
they bring;  
O hush the noise, ye men of strife and hear the angels sing.

### *Verse 4*

And ye, beneath life’s crushing load, whose forms are  
bending low,  
Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and  
slow,  
Look now! for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the  
wing.  
O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!

### *Verse 5*

For lo! the days are hastening on, by prophet seen of old,  
When with the ever circling years shall come the time  
foretold  
When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendors  
fling,  
And the whole world send back the song which now the  
angels sing.

**Vocabulary** In one or two words define the following terms from the poem.

*Verse 1:* solemn

*Verse 2:* cloven, unfurled, lowly, hovering, Babel

*Verse 3:* woes, strife, ye

*Verse 4:* ye, toil, wear, O

*Verse 5:* lo, hastening, prophet, foretold, splendors

**Word Pictures** Word pictures is another way of saying *imagery*. *Imagery* or *figurative language* helps us form a picture of what the author is trying to present. Discuss what these word pictures mean and, perhaps, draw your idea of the *imagery* or *figurative language* the author uses!

*Verse 1:* midnight clear; glorious song; angels bending near the earth; harps of gold; angels sing

*Verse 2:* cloven skies; peaceful wings unfurled; weary world; bend on hovering wing

*Verse 3:* woes of sin and strife

*Verse 4:* beneath life’s crushing load; forms are bending low; rest beside the weary road

*Verse 5:* days are hastening; prophet of old; ever circling years; ancient splendors fling

**Mechanics** are the nuts and bolts of a poem. Verbally discuss.

***Who is the speaker?*** (Does the speaker have a specific personality or has the author remained in the background so the message of the poem will be more clear?)

***What does the poem reveal about the speaker's character?*** (Sometimes, poems reveal nothing about the speaker's personal thoughts, feelings, or attitudes. Yet, the poem may demonstrate those character traits that are important to the author like courage, loyalty, perseverance, etc.)

***Is the speaker addressing someone in particular or is it to anyone?*** (Sometimes poems are not directed to anyone in particular, but to anyone that may read it.)

***Does the poem have a setting?*** (Does the author tell where the poem occurs? Is the poem about a specific event?)

***Is the poem about a particular event?*** (Is the event past or present? If it is about a past event, does the remembrance of the event have a particular meaning to the speaker?)

***Is the theme of the poem stated directly or indirectly?*** (Some poems are straightforward and are meant to be taken literally. In songs, the theme may be presented in the refrain or in the last few lines. Sometimes the theme is a little bit more difficult to discern as it is made with figurative language or symbols.)

***What point of view or perspective is the speaker?*** (What meaning do you think the poem has for the author?)

***How did you respond to the poem when you read it the first time?*** (Did your thoughts and feelings change after you took time to study it?)

**Comprehension Questions** Verbally discuss

*Verse 1:* What came upon a midnight clear? Do you think the author of this poem took “poetic license” when stating “From angels bending near the earth, to touch their harps of gold”? Why? How does the Bible describe angels?

*Verse 2:* Why do you think the author used the phrase “cloven skies”? What exactly does this mean? What floats “over all the weary world”? Why do you think the author describes the world as “weary”? Why would the plains be “sad and lowly”? What does the author mean by Babel sounds?

*Verse 3:* What has the world suffered with? Who is told to hush? What does the author tell them to do instead?

*Verse 4:* Who is being crushed? Why are their steps painful? What does the author tell them to do in the last line?

*Verse 5:* What does the author mean by “prophet bards”? Explain and discuss: “the whole world send back the song which now the angels sing”

Did this historical event or message become more real to you after reading this poem? Why?

After reading this poem, what character traits did you think of? What does the Bible have to say about these character traits?

### **What Does the Bible Say?**

Find Scripture proofs for each of the assertions or statements made for each of the five verses.

Re-read the Gospel accounts of the Nativity along with Isaiah 53. What does the Bible say about angels? Is this consistent with what this poem states? Why/why not? When does the Bible say peace will come to earth and wickedness will cease? Compare/contrast what the Bible says to this poem.

### **The Author/Poet**

Based on what you have studied about this poem so far, would you guess that the author was a Christian or a humanist? How did you arrive at your decision?

The name of the author for this poem or lyric is Edmund Hamilton Sears (1810-1876). He was born 6 April 1810, Sandisfield, Massachusetts, and died 14 January 1876, Weston, Massachusetts. He attended Harvard Divinity School and served in Unitarian churches. (Note: Christians are trinitarian, not unitarian.)

### **Geography**

Locate Massachusetts on a globe, map and atlas.

*Challenge* Locate Sandisfield and Weston (Massachusetts) on a map or in an atlas.

Compare/contrast weather from Massachusetts with your own for one week.

Make an American meal for your family.

### **Activities**

1) Make your own book! Without making an image of Christ, draw pictures representing each verse. (Note: that will be five different illustrations). With construction paper and other items readily available at home, make a title page with the name of the song and the author's name which will be your book's cover. You may want to illustrate your cover and include this poem in your book.

2) Make your own play! Re-enact with your siblings or friends the event or message discussed in this poem. Keep it lively, simple, and short. You may want to end your play with singing a rousing chorus of this poem or reading Scripture verses. Videotape your creation.

3) Radio Drama! With a handheld tape recorder, create your own radio show dramatizing the historical event or message of this poem.

4) Be a Reporter! Either with your family camcorder or with a handheld tape recorder, "interview" various individuals connected with this poem (e.g., angels, heads of nations either current or past, the serpent, repentant sinner, etc.). In order to have the fast paced style of a reporter, watch and/or listen to the news with your parents' permission. Keep the interviews lively, quick, and to the point.

Remain objective! Being objective means just reporting the facts and not giving your opinion of the situation.

5) What is one of the things you most enjoy? Is it literature? math? science? sports? cooking? Take that area of interest and relate that to this poem. If you enjoy dance, for example, develop a dance routine that physically expresses the sentiments of this poem. If you enjoy shop, create something out of wood that helps to clarify this poem. Do you enjoy creating stories? Write a story based on any time period you desire that expresses the sentiments of this poem. Do you enjoy creating things in the kitchen? Make an ancient meal from this time or develop your own meal that symbolizes the many different points this poem makes.

6) Poster. Create a poster illustrating the the author's view of the impact of *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*.

7) Scavenger Hunt. Go to the library to learn what you can about Edmund Hamilton Sears (1810-1876) and share it with your family. If possible, discover the story behind this poem.