



Students, Staff, Parents and Community Members of Easton,

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays! I hope you are able to spend the Holidays with family celebrating the season. Now is the time to take some rest, feel gratitude for the many things we are blessed with, and become a little closer to the ones we love.

Holiday music is a favorite of mine during Christmas and it is always playing in the background at my home. I have made it a bit of a tradition to better understand the stories behind some of my favorite Christmas carols each year. I would like to share one with you today.

The year was 1863 and the Civil War had been tearing apart our great country for nearly two and a half years, marking one of the darkest times in American history. The great writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's son, Charles, against his father's will, left home to join the Union Army. He was seriously wounded in the Battle of Mine Run in November 1863.

Upon hearing the news, and not knowing the whereabouts or condition of Charles, Longfellow left his home to make a desperate search for his injured son. He was found, and Longfellow remained by his side through Christmas. Charles made a miraculous recovery.

On Christmas Day 1863, Henry penned the poem "Christmas Bells" which eventually was put to music and became "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day". In it, Longfellow laments the inevitability of life's trials, but expresses the hope that Christmas brings. There are times when life has the ability to knock us down, but when I hear carols like "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day", I am reminded that Christmas is the season of hope, and as Longfellow says "The wrong shall fail/the right prevail/with peace on earth". It's my wish that your Christmas Season is filled with music, lights, laughter, and above all-hope.

**From my family to yours, Merry Christmas.
Mark Stanley**