

It Came Upon a Midnight Clear

IT CAME UPON A MIDNIGHT CLEAR THAT GLO-
 RIOUS SONG OF OLD FROM AN-

GELS BENDING NEAR THE EARTH TO TOUCH THEIR HARPS

OF GOLD PEACE ON THE EARTH GOOD WILL

TO MEN FROM HEAVENS ALL GRACIOUS KING THE WORLD IN
 SOLEMN STILLNESS LAY TO HEAR THE ANGELS SING.

Lyrics

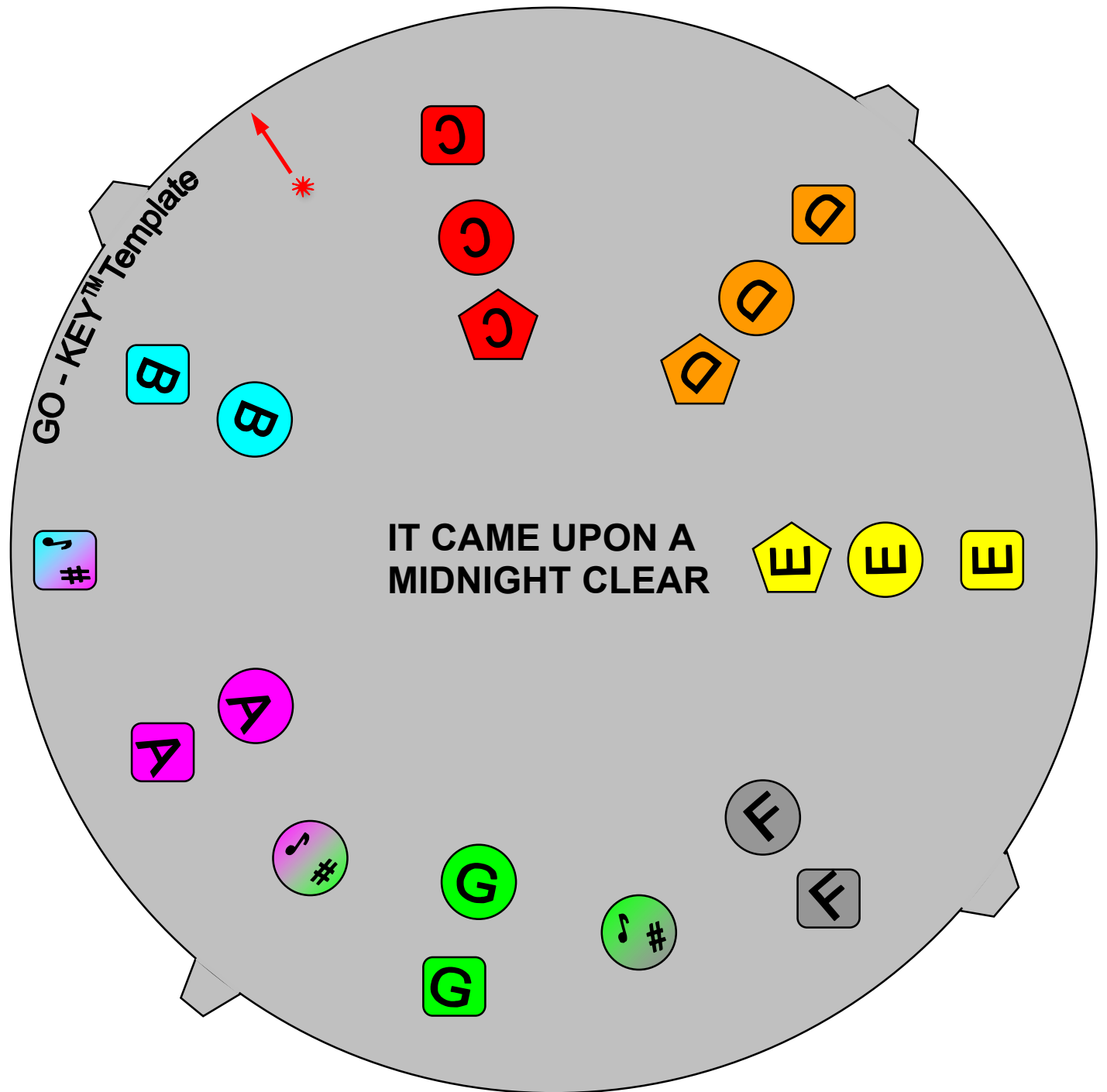
It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,
From heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay,
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled,
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains,
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

Yet 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.

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!

For lo!, the days are hastening on,
By prophet bards foretold,
When with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendors fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.



History and Origin

"It Came Upon the Midnight Clear" (1849), sometimes rendered as "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear", is a poem and Christmas carol written by Edmund Sears, pastor of the Unitarian Church in Wayland, Massachusetts. Sears' lyrics are most commonly set to "Noel", adapted by Arthur Sullivan from an English melody (in Commonwealth countries), or to "Carol", composed by Richard Storrs Willis (in the United States). Edmund Sears composed the five-stanza poem in common metre doubled during 1849. It first appeared on December 29, 1849, in the *Christian Register* in Boston, Massachusetts.

Sears served the Unitarian congregation in Wayland, Massachusetts, before moving on to a larger congregation in Lancaster. After seven years of hard work, he suffered a breakdown and returned to Wayland. He wrote *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear* while serving as a part-time preacher in Wayland. Writing during a period of personal melancholy, and with news of revolution in Europe and the United States' war with Mexico fresh in his mind, Sears portrayed the world as dark, full of "sin and strife", and not hearing the Christmas message.

Sears is said to have written these words at the request of his friend, William Parsons Lunt, pastor of United First Parish Church, Quincy, Massachusetts, for Lunt's Sunday school. One account says the carol was first performed by parishioners gathered in Sears' home on Christmas Eve, but to what tune the carol was sung is unknown as Willis' familiar melody was not written until the following year.

According to Ken Sawyer, Sears' song is remarkable for its focus not on Bethlehem, but on his own time, and on the contemporary issue of war and peace. Written in 1849, it has long been assumed to be Sears' response to the just ended Mexican–American War. The song has been included in many of the Christmas albums recorded by numerous singers in the modern era.

Richard Storrs Willis is the composer of the tune common to the United States. In 1850 Richard Storrs Willis, a composer who trained under Felix Mendelssohn, wrote the melody called "Carol". This melody is most often set in the key of B-flat major in a 6/8 time signature. "Carol" is the most widely known tune to the song in the United States.