

## A WINTER FORECAST: SNOW IS ON THE WAY

Winter in Maine and many other places means snow is going to be a welcome or unwelcome visitor. We look out a window and are delighted to see the falling flakes or we groan in anticipation of shoveling and of the challenging travel conditions for roadways and waterways. Sometimes it depends on age. Children usually love the magic sight. It will be lots of fun and maybe no school. (Some dogs run with delight among the drifts and others plead, “Please. Let’s go inside.”) So the snow falls and falls--and always has an impact on our lives.

The psalmist had much less cold than we do in New England but it made him turn to the One who sends it in its icy vestments. “God spreads snow like wool: frost God strews like ashes. God scatters hail like crumbs. Before the cold the waters freeze. God lets the breeze blow and the waters run” (Ps 147: 16-18). For the singer of psalms, snow was just a covering; not the kind of whiteout it can be in our northern regions. And it didn’t stay around that long.

The New England Quaker John Greenleaf Whittier writes quite differently in *Snow-bound, A Winter Idyl*. “As night drew on and, from the crest/ Of wooded knolls that ridged the west,/The sun, a snow-blown traveler, sank/ From sight beneath the smothering bank./ We piled with care, our nightly stack/ Of wood against the chimney back..” The increasing quiet that mounting snow offers the winter landscape leads to inward silence where God speaks in wordless wonder. Or maybe, as with Whittier, poetry emerges from our consciousness. If so, please make it rhyme as he did. Much easier to memorize!

There is more labor involved when temperatures plummet, and the cold descent of the gauge in our thermometers can bring us anxiety: the cost of fuel, the possibility of slipping on ice. Nature’s forces at times bear down heavily on our human fragility and we groan. But their Author is with us in every changing weather challenge. “Though the mountains leave their place and the hills be shaken, My love shall never leave you...says the Lord Who has mercy on you” (Is 54:10).

It is often noted that every snowflake is different. In all their whirring downfall, no two flakes are just alike. Made up of water vaporized into crystals, most are less than an inch across

except for times when temperatures are near freezing or when light winds blow. Then large irregular flakes can be two inches across. But not one repeats another. They differ in structure and surface markings. Looking at the bright white pile, we see the products of an Artist Who never reaches the end of possible designs.

Fresh snow is 90 to 95 percent trapped air. Resting on the ground, it can serve as an insulating blanket, helping to counteract the changing temperatures' effect on the soil. Skis, snowshoes, toboggans, sleds, and snowmobiles come out into the open. Hardy souls that we northerners are, we embrace the outdoor possibilities for enjoyment.

Our own Maine author, Sarah Orne Jewett, wrote in 1872 in a Christian religious weekly, "For, though the clouds grow dark o'erhead, /And storms may bring us sorrow,/ It's not for always, and the sun/ Still shines--will shine to-morrow." This native of South Berwick, Maine, who usually wrote about summer picnics on one of the nearby islands, invites us to prayer as her pen moves on, "Dear Lord of Light! forever lead/ Our wandering hearts. Oh! guide us;/ Nor let us once in storm or sun/ Forget the Friend beside us" (*Daybreak*).

Pristine loveliness transfigures our chilly world. "God does great things beyond our knowing, wonders past our searching out. God says to the snow, 'Fall to the earth'" (Jb 37:5). After a storm when the sun comes out again, a dazzling whiteness reflects the solar rays. This winter snowscape offered to our vision points to its Maker.

We move with studied carefulness where our booted feet can go. Looking all around we find messages from a bountiful Creator. "God the Lord has spoken and summoned the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting....Perfect in beauty God shines forth" (Ps 50: 1,2). In this cathedral of nature with the trees bowed down in worship, it may be too cold to kneel. But we join our hands in well-knit gloves as a gesture of gratitude for all that is given us these winter months. And our frozen breath sings, "Praise God."

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