

December 14, 2011

Dear Friends,

"It's the Most Wonderful Time of the Year" was written in 1963 and made popular by Andy Williams who recorded and released the song that same year on *The Andy Williams Christmas Album*.

It wasn't always that way. There was a time when people hated Christmas. It started in England in the mid 17th century with the Puritans. They considered themselves a highly religious people who wanted to live their lives strictly by the Bible. They believed in hard work and frowned upon idleness and leisure. After fighting a bloody civil war they passed laws changing life in England. Inns were closed. Sports were banned. Women were forbidden to wear makeup. The last Wednesday of each month was declared a fast day. Those were gloomy times.

The Puritans also banned Christmas (1644) and anything associated with it such as singing Christmas carols and eating mincemeat pie. That was because people celebrated it in a rowdy and disorderly way. Christmas was a day noted for public drunkenness and wild parties where men and women would wear each other's clothes.

The Puritans were thrifty and hard working people. Their attitude regarding Christmas came to our shores when they arrived in 1620. They were strong in Boston and Christmas was banned by law in 1659. Anyone exhibiting the Christmas spirit was punished with a fine. Even though the law was finally lifted in 1681 it took a long time for attitudes to change. School still remained in session on Christmas Day and evergreens were forbidden in public buildings.

Our attitude regarding Christmas began to radically change in the 19th century. Most people believe it began with the beautiful books about Christmas written by Washington Irving (1819) and Charles Dickens (1843). No longer a rowdy celebration, Christmas was presented as a warm hearted day centered on the family, especially the children. The family would gather under the warmth of the Christmas tree singing carols, exchanging gifts and enjoying Christmas dinner.

The first Christmas trees were sold in the United States in 1850. Christmas became a federal holiday in 1870. Thomas Edison displayed electric Christmas lights in 1879. The first White House Christmas tree was set up by President Benjamin Harrison in 1889. It had glass balls, gold tinsel and lighted candles. In 1901, Ladies Home Journal had the first advertisement ever for Christmas lights for our trees.

Christmas is "The Most Wonderful Time of the Year." That's because we were able to rediscover the true meaning of Christmas. Like the shepherds who worshiped the baby Jesus in the manger on Christmas Eve we gather with our families at church and at home to worship Jesus, the Savior of the World. It is truly a "silent night, a holy night, where all is calm, all is bright." There is Jesus, the "holy infant so tender and mild. Sleep in heavenly peace. Sleep in heavenly peace" (Hymn from 1818).