

## SILENT NIGHT

### Luke 2:1-20

**The story behind Silent Night is the story of a miracle.** December 24, 1818: In the little village of Oberndorf, Austria, Father Joseph Mohr is getting the church ready for Christmas Eve services that night, when he discovers that mice have chewed through the bellows of the organ and destroyed it. In horror, he frantically runs back to his house and grabs a poem he'd written about the birth of Christ. He takes it to Franz Gruber, the local school master, who is also the church organist, and he says, "Franz, Franz, the church organ's been destroyed! Quick - take this poem and write a tune that can be played on guitar!"

And that night, since they couldn't do real music on the organ, Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber performed Silent Night on guitar. And lo and behold, it was a miracle! This last-minute rush job – this poor, makeshift replacement for *real music* – actually turned out pretty good.

(Sort of like in school when you wrote a paper the night before it was due and you still got a B-).

Now, isn't that a great story? The only problem is, we're not really sure that's how it happened.

Here's what we do know:

We know that Joseph Mohr, who was actually the assistant priest, took the poem to Franz Gruber on Christmas Eve day, 1818. He had actually written the poem two years earlier, in 1816.

And we know that Father Mohr asked Gruber to compose a tune that could be played on guitar. But the fact is we don't really know why. We have no record of the organ being destroyed. It may be that Austrian folk music was becoming a thing, like in the Sound of Music. It may be that Father Mohr just liked the guitar.

We also know that that very same night, Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber performed their new song at the Christmas Eve service. Father Mohr played the guitar and sang tenor, and Franz Gruber sang bass.

And finally we know this: Tonight, all around the world, in over 100 different languages, people are lighting candles and singing this song. And as this simple song leads people to focus on Jesus, it ushers in peace on earth, if only for a few moments.

So the real miracle behind Silent Night is not the last-minute rush job, but the *power of simplicity*. The words were written by an assistant priest from a small village. The music was composed by a local school teacher. And at the world premiere, on Christmas Eve

1818, there was no grand orchestra to play, and no famous celebrity to sing – there was just the priest, and the school teacher, and a guitar.

**Now, fast-forward 96 years to Christmas Eve 1914.**

World War I is raging across Europe. It's trench warfare – the soldiers would dig trenches on the battlefield and shoot at each other from the trenches. The ground between the trenches was called No Man's Land – you didn't go there unless you wanted to get shot.

Well, on Christmas Eve, the German soldiers were hunkered down in their trenches, were tired of war and they were longing for home, and they wanted at least a little bit of Christmas cheer, so they put up little tiny Christmas trees and they lit candles.

And they began to sing:

*Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht  
Alles schlaft, Einsam Wacht*

And the British soldiers on the other side of the front heard the singing. And they recognized the tune. And they joined in in English:

*Silent Night, Holy Night  
All is calm, All is bright*

And the next thing you know, somebody climbed out of the trench into No Man's Land. And then somebody else. And then somebody else.

And German and British soldiers met in the middle of the battlefield. And they shook hands. And they embraced. And they exchanged gifts – whatever they had – candy, cigarettes, alcohol – they took buttons off their uniforms and shared them with each other as souvenirs.

And then – they worked together to bury the dead: Joint services – British and German – praying together for the souls of friend and foe alike.

And then the sun came up and it was Christmas day – and they played soccer. Nobody wanted to sit out of the game, so they had like 50 men on each team. You could imagine it was a low-scoring game. The Germans won by a score of 2 to 1. (And the Brits have been trying to catch up ever since!)

The Christmas Eve truce of 1914 lasted several days until the higher ups at military headquarters found out about it and sent stern orders to the troops: “Knock off the foolishness and get back to killin' each other!”

But here's the thing: Even if it didn't last, because of human sin, at least for a few days, Jesus came into that world and brought about Peace on Earth.

**“Silent Night” brings about peace by calling us to focus on Jesus:**

*Silent Night, Holy Night  
 Son of God, Love's pure light  
 Radiant beams from thy holy face  
 With the dawn of redeeming grace  
 Jesus, Lord at thy birth. Jesus, Lord at thy birth.*

We're going to sing this tonight—and we're going to experience peace. But there's just one thing that bothers me. And I hope this doesn't ruin the song for you. But friends, when Jesus was born, IT WAS NOT A SILENT NIGHT!

Think about it: How many of you have been present at the birth of a baby? Was it a quiet affair? Mom is screaming, the nurses are saying, "Push, push," Dad is shouting encouragement and support – either that or he's fainting in the corner.

Then the doctor comes in and the baby is born, and the baby cries and mom cries, and dad gets out the camera...

Now imagine that happening outdoors – in an animal stall: No doctors. No nurses. No fetal monitor. No epidural

*Does that sound like a silent night to you?*

And think about this: Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem because of a census. Bethlehem was crowded to the hilt. People were far from home – people who didn't want to be there. The hotels were full. The taverns were full.

What do people do when they're far from home and they're lonely and they have nothing else to do? They drink! And they get drunk. And they carouse and they fight and they pass out in the streets and they cause all kinds of trouble.

*Does that sound like a silent night to you?*

And then think about this: Roman soldiers!

In one community where I lived, all the churches came together and did a walk-through nativity called "Return to Bethlehem." I always played the part of a Roman soldier. My job was to intimidate people so they would feel something of what the people of Judea felt at the time of Christ. People would jump whenever I shouted my line: "Move along! Keep the streets clear!"

When Mary and Joseph went to Bethlehem, Roman soldiers were a constant reminder that a brutal conquering force occupied their country. Who knows, maybe there was a soldier standing right beside the stable shouting, "Move along, keep the streets clear!"

*Does that sound like a silent night to you?*

And then think about this: Animals! When a horse whinnies, you can hear it for miles. When a cow moos – far away it’s sweet – but right up next to you—that is not pleasant!

And besides that: Even if the animals were quiet – there’s nothing you can do to get rid of the smell. Farm animals are not house broken!

*Does that sound like a silent night to you?*

And then think about this: Things finally settle down. The animals finally get quiet. The baby falls asleep. Joseph fluffs up the hay. They lay Jesus in the manger – so quiet – so precious. Mary drifts off to sleep. And at last Joseph can relax.

And then here they come: The Shepherds! *“Excuse me, ma’am – a bunch of shiny fellers up in the sky told us y’all got a baby here we need to see. Oh, is that him lyin’ there in the cow feed? Well, ooo-wee, ain’t he pretty!”*

And then the horse wakes up and starts to whinny. And the cow starts to moo. And then one of the sheep that came with the shepherds gets scared and starts to baa. And the thing about sheep is, if one sheep does something, all the rest have to follow. So now all the sheep are going baa, baa, baa, baa. And maybe a Roman soldier walks up and yells, “What’s going on here?” And the drunk people are carousing. And the crowds are milling about

*Does that sound like a silent night to you?*

**Instead of silent night, think**

Noisy night  
Painful night  
Chaotic night  
Smelly night

And then think about this: That’s exactly the point!

*Jesus didn’t come to a perfect world. Jesus came to our world.*

And our world is a mess:

The noise of war, strife, violence  
The pain of brokenness  
The chaos of confusion  
The stench of sin

That’s the world we live in. And that’s the world Jesus came to

*Jesus didn't come to a perfect world. Jesus came to our world.*

And the Gospel of John tells us why:

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

The world God loves is not the perfect world you see in sanitized nativity scenes. The world God loves is the real world:

- The one where babies cry
- And animals stink
- And people hurt
- And people hurt each other

*Jesus didn't come to a perfect world. Jesus came to our world.*

**So here's the question: Has Jesus come to your world?**

Have you invited Jesus into your world by inviting Jesus into your life?

Maybe your life is as messy and as chaotic as Bethlehem was on that not-so-silent night.

Maybe you're like a woman giving birth—your life is full of pain.

Maybe you've got crowds of crazy people in your life.

Maybe you're dealing with drunkenness and addiction—yours or somebody else's.

Maybe you're being oppressed – not by Roman soldiers, but by an overbearing parent, or a tyrant of a boss, or an abusive spouse.

*Jesus wants to come into that world.*

Maybe World War 1 is going on in your life—except it's not the British and the Germans – it's you and your spouse—or it's you and your kids—or it's you and the people you're having dinner with tomorrow!

*Jesus wants to come into that world.*

Maybe your life has lost direction and you're not sure what to do. You're confused. You're not sure what you believe.

*Jesus wants to come into that world.*

So why don't you ask him in?

In this special place, on this holy night, ask the child who was born in Bethlehem to be born in you.

If you would like Jesus to enter your world, pray after me these words from the fourth verse of "O Little Town of Bethlehem":

*Oh holy child of Bethlehem, descend to me, I pray.  
Cast out my sin, and enter in.  
Be born in me today. Amen.*