

## "The Songs of Christmas"

### Silent Night, Holy Night

**Luke 2:4-7**

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#### **Introduction**

If you brought your Bibles, would you open them to **Luke 2:4-7**.

While you are turning there, let me remind you that this morning we find ourselves in the midst of a December series on the "Songs of Christmas". Each Sunday leading up to Christmas, we will look at the history and theology of the birth of Christ, found within the lyrics of some of the most beloved Christmas Carols throughout time. Last week Pastor Don took you to the little town of Bethlehem as you looked at the story behind the song and saw the importance of this little town. This week I want us to look at the deep and wonderful lyrics to the Christmas Carol – *Silent Night*. And in doing that, let us look first at the inspired word of God. *Read Luke 2:4-7.*

*Pray.*

**Silent Night, Holy Night** – as you hear those words, I want to transport you back 203 years ago to the mountains of Salzburg, Austria. The year was 1816 and a young Austrian priest named Joseph Mohr was overlooking the beautiful village in which he ministered, with the clear night sky above him and the settled homes below – his mind drifted to that glorious night in which Jesus our Savior was born. And as he traced the steps of that amazing day, from the manger to the hills outside of Bethlehem, he thought of the peace, the joy, and the hope that was restored on that divine day – and with his heart full, he began to write the words to this Christmas lullaby – *Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm, all is bright*. He would later, with the assistance of a friend, sing this song with the accompaniment of a guitar during a Christmas Eve service two years later (1818). His heart smiled as he heard the words that warmed his heart years prior sung with the harmonies of a choir. Little did he know that these words would bring such comfort, peace, and hope to a world in need of a Savior for years to come. And my hope for us this morning is that we would never sing this song the same again – that we would grasp the wonderful truths these words highlight, and that this song would become the lullaby of our own hearts.

Let's break down the song verse by verse and look at the truths in God's Word it highlights.

**Stanza 1...**

*Silent Night, Holy Night; All is calm, all is bright.*

*Round yon virgin, mother and child; Holy infant, so tender and mild.*

*Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.*

We begin at the manger, and there in the warmth of the Israeli night we see...

#### **1. Silence is Broken for our Peace.**

**Silent Night, Holy Night** – The very title of this Christmas carol is repeated at the beginning of each stanza. And it reminds us of a significant truth. That is when Jesus cried out His first cry

into the night within that stable – the silence of God was broken. That may not mean much for us, because God speaks to us every time, we read His Word – but the events surrounding Jesus' birth was the first anyone from Israel had heard from God in 400 years.

**400 years of silence.** Think about it – God had always spoken to Israel, whether it was from a burning bush or out of the mouths of prophets, God consistently communicated with Israel, his chosen people. But it had now been 400 years since the last words were spoken from God. The prophets were no more, Godly men and women were few and far in between, and the word of God was hushed. During those years of silent torture, a proud country found themselves under the suppression of the Roman Empire crying out to God for help – but He was silent. And with His silence, hope and peace were nearly gone. But then something happened. A cry from a baby boy, born of humble surroundings, struck the air and God was silent no more. Hope and Peace were restored as the words of Isaiah the prophet became reality. God was no longer silent and He broke His silence by orchestrating the single greatest event in the history of mankind – “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.*” Within the words of this old carol, we are reminded that silence with God has been broken in the birth of His Son, our Savior.

But God did not only send His Son to break the silence and restore hope with mankind, in breaking His silence, He restored peace through Jesus Christ our Lord. The first stanza of this song continues on and it reads: *Round yon virgin, Mother and child; Holy infant, so tender and mild.* Only this child can bring peace to mankind. The imagery is rather simple and sweet as a Mother holds her sleeping firstborn *so tender and mild*; but Joseph Mohr wants us to realize that this child, although tender and mild as He sleeps, is no ordinary baby – He is the only Holy infant in history. And only He could restore peace to mankind – because He is Holy.

Now you may ask, **what has broken our peace with God?**

You see, from the moment of our first breath to our last, we are sinners – and with each word, thought, and step following our birth we find ourselves more lost and more hopeless – wandering further from the Holiness of God. Although the strong say that salvation can be had by our own hands, the wise know this is impossible – even our best efforts are like filthy rags – leaving us with one unfortunate conclusion: Due to the imperfection of myself and all of Humanity, Peace with God can never be had. That is why God took the initiative in pursuing peace by sending His Son to earth as a baby wrapped in swaddling clothing, and lying in a manger. And it is through our Savior, Jesus, that peace with God can be had once more. “*Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” **Romans 5:1.**

Our future is secure in Christ, and that overwhelming weight of guilt that has plagued every step, is forgiven the very moment we place our faith in Christ. As Mary undoubtedly looked with love and wonder at her sleeping baby boy, singing, “sleep in heavenly peace” – we too can rest in the presence of the Prince of Peace, because it is through Him that peace comes. **Luke 2:14 – “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace among men...”**

This was the night that silence was broken, and it was set apart from all other nights, as peace with mankind was restored.

Let's continue on, and look at the **second stanza**.

*Silent Night, Holy Night; Shepherds quake, at the sight.*

*Glories stream from heaven afar, Heavenly hosts sing 'Alleluia'.*

*Christ the Savior is born, Christ the Savior is born.*

It is in this second stanza that Joseph Mohr takes us from the manger to the hillsides of Bethlehem – where the shepherds fear turns to Worship, because they realize who this child is.

## **2. Fear turns to Worship because Christ the Savior is born!**

In this stanza, Joseph Mohr begins once again with "*Silent night, Holy Night*", but when we see the events that took place on that hillside, we soon realize that it was anything but silent! In fact, the events of that night caused the **Shepherds to quake, at the sight**... What caused the Shepherds to quake or tremble? What brought such great fear into their night? Well, let me set the stage for you. **Luke 2:8** tells us that, "*In the same region there were shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.*" To be a shepherd was a rather lonely job. It was you and your sheep; but at night, sometimes, you would find common ground with other shepherds and enjoy the silent night with a few friends. Either way, shepherds were never accused of 'big personalities' and 'public personas', rather they kept to themselves and spent more time interacting with sheep than humans – they were low valued and mostly seen as insignificant people. And as these humble shepherds rested quietly in the night, an angel of the Lord "*suddenly stood before them*" (v. 9); the word used to signify the angels standing before them is a word that literally means, '*in close proximity, or near*'. So, imagine a quiet night, as the stars shone above, filled with small talk and the bleating of sheep one moment and the next, out of what seemed like nowhere, the night sky was filled with an angel whose glory *shone around him* – in the Bible the Divine Glory is often seen as a blinding light – it caused men to fall on their faces and act as if they were dead, it blinded Paul. And so, this did more than startle these quiet, humble shepherds – the words used in Luke's Gospel, are that they were "*terribly frightened.*" This literally means *extremely terrified*. These poor shepherds were blinded by the **Glories streamed from heaven afar** – and it caused them to quake in fear for their lives at the sight of this otherworldly creature.

But this Angel came for a reason – for he had a glorious message to share with these humble men. "*But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'*" (**vv.10-11**). The message the angels had was not one of annihilation, but one of good news and great joy – God has broken His silence and the long awaited Messiah, the Savior, has come. You can find Him close by in a manger, gently wrapped in cloth. It was at that moment, when "*suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased!'*" (**vv. 13-14**). **Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!** The word 'Alleluia' means in Hebrew, "*Praise God!*" It is often used in Scripture to signify worship and praise – and so when the multitude of angels proclaim, "Glory to God in the highest!" it is very similar to saying, **Alleluia!** It is only in the Savior that our fears can turn to worship – which is the appropriate response as our hearts Praise God for sending Jesus the Messiah.

Let's continue on, and look at the **third and final stanza...**

*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.*

This is by far my favorite stanza of this song...I love the poetry and the imagery Joseph Mohr gives us when he wrote these words, for it is here that he reminds us...

### **3. The Birth of Jesus is the Dawn of Redeeming Grace.**

As God broke His silence by the birth of His Son, we begin to understand *love's pure light*.

What a great and poetic way to express God's gift – both *love and light* meet in the person of Jesus Christ. For in Him is the everlasting love of God expressed. “*For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him*” **John 3:16-17**. “*See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God, and such we are...*” **1 John 3:1**. “*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” **Romans 5:8**. In the person of Jesus Christ, the love of God is understood. When Jesus was born, God's love was fully realized! And love's pure light was Jesus – “*In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men.*” **John 1:4**. And when this baby grew up, He would say, “*I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in darkness, but will have the Light of life.*” **John 8:12**.

Joseph Mohr wanted our thoughts to understand that **Jesus is love's pure light**.

**Radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace.** I absolutely love these words for thought – from the face of Jesus, in the person of Jesus, is the beginning of redemptive grace. Redemptive grace is “*the grace of God that brings salvation*”.

“*For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*” **Ephesians 2:8-9**. In this poetic form, Joseph Mohr focuses in on the redeeming grace of the Savior. He would come as the Sacrificial Lamb that would take away the sins of the world. Redemption is through Him. Jesus is the Redeemer. And with His birth redemptions plan, forecasted and prophesied about thousands of years earlier would begin. The advent or birth of Jesus is **the dawn of redeeming grace**.

**Jesus, LORD at Thy Birth** – The word “*Lord*” means master and speaks of His authority over creation, over time, over circumstances – Only in the **LORD** is salvation offered and possible – and so Joseph Mohr reminds us in his third stanza that this baby, so tender and mild, is **LORD** of all creation – *God became flesh and dwelt among us*.

### **Conclusion**

And so in this seemingly simple lullaby, we learn a great deal about who Jesus is, why God sent Him, what His purpose would be, and what He can be to us. “*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.*” **Acts 4:12**. In this manger is the dawn of redeeming grace – where love and light meet – may we respond in worship.

*Pray with me.*