

# *The Songs of Christmas*

ADVENT: Day 5

## **"SILENT NIGHT"**

*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, oh*

*Sleep, sleep in heavenly, heavenly peace*

The melody and lyrics of "Silent Night" complement each other so well. It's a tender song about a holy night that quietly changed the world, and it sounds like that. The melody can lull you to sleep, but the lyrics can shake the world awake "with the dawn of redeeming grace."

The fact that such a simple, peaceful song has endured is a testimony to the truths it calmly, steadily, joyfully tells.

## **The story behind the song**

According to tradition, a flood-damaged organ may be to thank for the composition of one of the most famous Christmas carols.

In 1816, while serving at a church in Salzburg, Austria, Catholic priest Joseph Mohr wrote a poem titled "Stille Nacht," which is German for "silent or still night."

In 1818, Mohr was asked to write a new hymn for the Christmas mass. Fortunately for Mohr, he'd written one two years earlier. On Christmas Eve of 1818, he asked Franz Xaver Gruber, a schoolteacher and organist in a nearby town, to compose a melody on guitar for his poem.

The next night, because the organ was out of commission, Mohr plucked his guitar strings and sang "Silent Night" for the first time. In fact, the guitar Mohr used that night resides today at the Silent Night Museum in Austria.

Mohr never knew how popular and perennial his song would become. He spent most of his life serving the people of Salzburg. He chose to live simply. And he died in poverty because he'd given away what he had to those who needed it.

## **Are you still this Christmas?**

Twenty-first-century Christmases are anything but silent or still. It's a busy, hectic, joyfully noisy season. We can easily become overwhelmed with family, friends, and fun—and making sure it's well-documented on social media.

But celebrating Christmas wasn't always that way. Depending on your age, you might remember when people would decorate their Christmas trees on Christmas Eve and

take them down on New Year's Day. Or when Christmas was celebrated with the family and friends who lived nearby because travel wasn't possible or feasible.

We have added so much to our Christmas celebrations today that it might not be easy to remember how it was for Mary. But we have songs like "Silent Night" to help us imagine what that first Christmas could have been like.

Of course, I'm sure it wasn't a totally silent night. Jesus was born in a manger, and if any animals were nearby, it couldn't have been quiet or still all that long.

However, it was a holy night because the Son of God had entered the world.

He was born of a virgin, and God was his father. Everything about that "silent night" was miraculous. God chose to enter the world as a baby boy who slept peacefully in his mother's arms. It was a holy night, different from all others.

Maybe all of us should take note and insist on some silence in our Christmas seasons this year.

Let's put down our phones, turn off our electronic devices, and take time this Christmas season to have a "Stille Nacht" so we can remember that holy night.

I think Mary—and Joseph Mohr—would approve.

*"The Songs Tell the Story"*

An Advent Devotional By: Janet Denison