

THE MUSIC OF CHRISTMAS

Silent Night

Luke 2:1-14

Dr. Doyle Sager, First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, Missouri

10:00 a.m., December 24, 2017

LISTEN: <http://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/silent-night-holy-night/>

I will conclude this sermon series the way I began, by asking you: What would Christmas be like without music? Our final Christmas carol to be explored this Advent season is perhaps the most beloved of all—"Silent Night." You've probably heard parts of the story. It was first performed at St. Nicholas Church in Austria on this date in 1818 (199 years ago). The young priest, Joseph Mohr, wrote the lyrics and the organist, Franz Gruber, wrote the melody. The words and melody are simple, yet powerful.

"Holy infant so tender and mild..." Vulnerability in a hostile world. Now think about it. Bethlehem is 85 miles from Nazareth. What a journey for a mucho pregnant woman (I checked; that is a medical term). What filthy conditions for a birth. Have you ever smelled barn yard? And in the midst of this, the baby is born and placed in a feeding trough (where the moist, snotty snouts of animals have rummaged). Talk about lack of sanitary conditions! Jesus Christ was born in the midst of vulnerability.

Anyone out there feeling vulnerable this morning? Exposed to life's uncertainties? Financial, health, family issues? Or spiritual uncertainty? Jesus shows the way. God is working with and in the vulnerable. "Silent night, holy night..."

"Christ the Savior is born...Jesus, Lord at thy birth..." Notice what rich, solid theology Joseph Mohr managed to pack into these lyrics: He managed in those two phrases to capture Luke's three great claims in v. 11: Savior, Messiah/Christ and Lord. Savior= Deliverer; Messiah=Christ, or Anointed One, God's Chosen, the Expected One; Lord=Sovereign over all. And note that Jesus does not grow into lordship; he is lord at his birth!

When the word of Jesus' birth came to the shepherds, God's glory shone all around (v. 9). Glory...God's essence. "With the angels let us sing alleluia to our King..." Worship, our only response! Perhaps...perhaps we've done everything on our Christmas list except worship.

"Silent night, holy night...sleep in heavenly peace..." The message of the angels is one of peace (v. 14). The entire tone of the song is peaceful. Not bombastic, but serene and calm. We don't begin worship services with "Silent Night;" we end services with it. Don't you long for that? Peace with God, with others, among nations and people groups, with yourself, with created order.

Do you know the story of the spontaneous ceasefire that broke out on Christmas Eve, 1914, during WWI? All along the Western front, with Allied troops lined up against Germans, there came an eerie silence. A British soldier spied a makeshift Christmas tree in the German trench. Suddenly, the faint sound of music. And in German, "Silent night, holy night..." Then the British responded with the English version. Then, lo and behold, both sides came out of their

trenches and started trading gifts—cigarettes, buttons, hats. The British later erected a memorial to that strange truce. And “Silent Night” was the backdrop to it all. That’s what the soldiers on both sides of the Front experienced 103 years ago today—a common language for our faith, a longing for peace.

What Christmas truce do you need to call? What hand do you need to reach out and shake? Silent night, holy night...heavenly peace. God’s gift.