Silent Night

Thank you all for coming today, especially all the men. I know this interferes with your last minute... I mean early Christmas Eve shopping trip. Don’t worry, you still have time, there’s like 6 whole hours until Christmas.

We are bad at this! And it’s like a quality passed on from one generation to the next. One year my dad bought his sister a cup of coffee because the gas station was the only thing open on the way to her house. He was like hey I knew you needed a pick me up, so I waited until 7-11 had it just right! Your welcome! Anyway, we are glad you all are here.

This advent season, we have been taking a trip down the lane of Christmas Carols that we are accustomed to singing. We have learned about the origin and meaning of songs like What Child is this, O come o come Emmanuel, and oh Holy night. Today we want to lean into the lessons learned from the song Silent Night.

One of the opportunities we have as a church is to hear the BLESS stories of our congregation. BLESS is the rhythm we have that helps us look for opportunities to share the gospel. If you don’t know, BLESS is the rhythm in which we, Begin with prayer, Listen to others and hear their stories, Eat or share a meal and time of fellowship, Serve others with the heart of care, and when the opportunity presents itself, we Share our story and share the story of what Jesus means to us and what He has done for us.

This year we have heard stories of our members sharing Jesus in McDonald’s, we have heard stories of Jesus being shared in parking lots and airports. We have heard stories of people showing up to the church with questions and leaving with a new relationship with Jesus. We have seen miraculous divine appointments that could only be made possible because of Jesus.

The only reason these testimonies could be possible, is because God decided to walk among us and take on the sin of the world and provide life to all who believe.

Let’s be honest, this year has been full of turmoil. Disease rattles our view of existence. Wars flood the news, immorality and godlessness covers the internet and social media waves, murder is on every channel. Violence, kidnappings and chaos seek to define our existence.

You would think getting to the end of the year and getting to this time of reflection would calm us down, but as soon as October 31 11:59 pm leaves, Materialism runs the day, cash registers are ringing, new car commercials are singing, and fights for the last big screen tv and video game console reveal the emptiness of the human heart.

But something happens when one song is sung. For one moment, people stop and understand why we are here, what this means, and who is in control. That song is Silent Night.

This song calms the savage shopping spree, this song soothes the crying toddler in the mall. This song tells the story of the moment when the world was changed forever. It tells the story of that night when our savior was born.
I don’t know about you, but when I hear this song or start singing this song, it’s like I am put back into that night when God chose to walk in our shoes. I can see myself standing next to the manager, I feel the intensity of joy and anticipation all at the same time. I can see a young mother chosen to be the mother of God and a young man called to be the earthly father of the creator of Heaven and Earth.

We sing this song every year at Christmas, and I hope that after today you will sing it with a renewed sense of appreciation for the night the song describes.

There are three lessons I want us to learn about this song Silent Night, are you interested?

I want to talk about 1-The Story, 2-The Savior, and 3-The Not So Silent Night.

The story

According to the Silent Night Museum, "Silent Night" was written in 1816 by a young priest in Austria, Joseph Mohr, not long after the Napoleonic wars had taken their toll.

In the year 1816, an Austrian priest by the name of Joseph Mohr wrote the lyrics to a song he titled, “Stille Nacht.” Two years later, a schoolteacher and church organist Franz Gruber composed the music to Stille Nacht and performed it for the first time on guitar, not organ, during a Christmas midnight mass at St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria. It is told that the guitar was not an approved instrument for mass so it had to be performed actually after mass.

Hear the story of this writer. Joseph Mohr was born on December 11, 1792 in Salzburg, Austria. He grew up in a small damp room with his mother Anna Schoiber, his grand-mother, Maria, his two half-sisters and his cousin Theresia. They all shared one small, damp room and earned their living by spinning and knitting. His father, Franz Joseph Mohr, joined the army in Salzburg and all he did for his son was to give him his name before he deserted.

His mother was sentenced to a fine of nine florins, or 18 shillings, for her "carnal offence", the crime of bearing an illegitimate child. This was as much as Anna earned in a whole year so she was forced to accept the offer of the rich town executioner to adopt Joseph as his godchild. At that time and with those origins, Joseph would never have been allowed to learn a craft. However, the cathedral choirmaster noticed Joseph’s musical abilities and made sure Joseph received an education including learning organ, guitar and violin. These opportunities led to Joseph choosing a future in the priesthood, entering the priestly seminary in Salzburg at age 19. He was ordained in 1815 at 23 years of age.

He first served in the village where his grandfather lived, and where he wrote the text of ‘Silent Night’. A painting of Mary and the three kings on the side of the 12th century church in the town, may have been the inspiration for Mohr’s song which was originally six verses.

Health issues brought on by the harsh climate forced Mohr to return to Salzburg in 1817. After he recovered, he moved to Oberndorf, there he became friends with church organist Franz Xaver Gruber who was a schoolteacher in the neighboring town of Arnsdorf. Gruber is the one who composed the music to Silent Night.
As the story goes, the organ at St. Nicholas’ Church needed repair. The organ repairman was called on to repair it, he heard the song, and brought it back to his home in the Ziller valley in Austria. There he played it to a family of singing sisters, the Strassers. They incorporated Silent Night into their repertoire as they travelled around German-speaking central Europe.

The German version of the song became popular in the United States two decades before it was translated into English. “Stille Nacht” was performed for the first time in America in Central Park, Manhattan. The English translation we most frequently sing today was written and published by Episcopal priest John Freeman Young in 1859, who translated three verses of Mohr’s original six.

The composition evolved and was translated into over 300 languages with many different arrangements for various voices and ensembles. It was sung in churches, in town squares, even on the battlefield during World War I.

It was a rough beginning for Joseph Mohr: a fatherless childhood, an impoverished upbringing, and yet, thanks to his relationship with God, a loving mother, and talented, caring friends, Joseph was used by God to pen words that still challenge, move, and inspire us to this day.

The story is about the song... written by a man... who was telling the story of our savior.

**The Savior**

Verse 1 begins - 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

I have sung this song for years and not really understood the first verse. The word Round means Around, and Yon is an old word for “over there”. The song is saying, around over there is the mother and the child. That’s the savior. Our peace is over there. Our gift is over there.

When I grew up, my mother loved to decorate the house. She wanted our living room to gleam with holiday cheer. Our tree was tall and green and under the tree were presents stacked on top of presents. I would walk by the tree in anticipation of what was under the tree. I would imagine the new hot wheel track that awaited me. I would imagine the new Nintendo that I was going to play until I fell asleep. I would dream of the Tonka truck that I couldn’t wait to play with. And finally, the day came when I was going to live out my dreams, and I ran to the tree ready to rip the presents open. And I opened them and one by one I was met with the fact that these were nicely wrapped empty boxes. They had the appearance of gifts, they had the appearance of presents, they came across as promising opportunities for my joy to be fulfilled, only to find that they were empty. There was nothing in the box. It gave me hope with no follow through. It gave me a false sense of joy.

Today we spend more time on the wrapping than we do the actual gifts. We fall into the glitz and glam of the holidays, thinking that this will bring hope. We are caught up in the back and forth of the decorations we even speak greetings to one another while our focus is on the stuff, but we soon find that all we were basing our trust on is only nicely wrapped empty boxes.

Silent Night tells us of the gift that is not fluff. The gift that is wrapped in swaddling cloths, the baby, not an empty gift, a gift that will give eternal life.
The song describes the story told in Luke Chapter 2 where Caesar Augustus called for a census which caused David to have to take his pregnant wife to Bethlehem where she gave birth. Luke 2:7 says...And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Luke goes on to explain the scene of the birth of Jesus in verses 8 – 20.

Luke 2:8 And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. 10 And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!” 15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” 16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. 17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

This scene is described in verse 2 of the song...

Verse 2 - 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.

The world doesn’t need more lights. The world doesn’t need more bells. The world doesn’t need more whistles. The world doesn’t need more smoke. The world doesn’t need more mirrors. The world doesn’t need more presents or flashing things or more distractions. The world needs Jesus. The little boy who was the savior, the infant that was fully God and fully man, the baby who was Lord at his birth.

This song tells the story of Emmanuel, God with us. The miraculous occurrence known as the hypostatic union. This is the theological term used to describe the person of Jesus as fully God and fully man at the same time. God put on a human body and understands what it feels like to hurt, he understands what it feels like to be let down. He feels pain and disappointment. He had to take on humanity in order to be our savior. And to show His love for us, Jesus sat his divine attributes aside so that he could walk with us and among us.

If you want to know the spirit of Christmas, simply turn to Philippians 2:1–8:

2:1 So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, 2 complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. 3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by
taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

That’s why we sing verse 3...verse 3 - 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.

The song is entitled Silent Night, but what we have on the night that Jesus was born is a not so silent night. A night that brought peace into a chaotic situation and drowned out the calamity of the world.

We have heard the story, we have been introduced to the savior, now we see the silent night was not so silent.

**The not so silent night**

Too often at this time of year, we spend months and meetings trying to plan how we are going to outshine the world. We strategize about how to make a bang on Christmas so that we will draw the attention of the world. How can we make sure people hear us, how do we compete with the noise of the world, how do we counter the bright lights the jingling bells? The Bible tells us the answer to the noise of this world is a silent night.

On that night God burst onto the scene and Hell erupted with shouts of fear and Heaven erupted in shouts of praise.

At the birth of Jesus, the impact caused the enemy to shake in his boots.

At the birth of Jesus, the impact caused angels to sing the hallelujah chorus.

At the birth of Jesus, the impact caused dead souls to feel the hope of being made alive.

At the birth of Jesus, the impact of the walls of hostility being broken down were set into motion.

At the birth of Jesus, the impact of our God who keeps his promises, was proven to be true.

The night was silent, but the impact was heard around the world.

Darkness overtaken by light. Hate overtaken by love. War overtaken by peace.

Not just peace, the prince of peace.

One of the best examples of the peace that entered the world told by this song is shown in the truce of World War 1 in 1914.

In December of 1914 the Great War had been in motion for five months and already claimed the lives of over a million soldiers.

One particular battle broke out between the Germans and the British soldiers.

They were in Trenches just yards from each other. They had been going at it for five straight days.

Then on Christmas Eve around 8:30 the shooting stopped for a moment and something very unusual happened.
The soldiers had to bow at the presence of the prince of peace. Jesus is translated in every language. His peace is available to all who hear. His love covers all mankind.

The person who is our peace brought the hope of peace into the world. That peace is so loud it drowns out the sound of doubt and destruction. The peace that entered this world on that Silent Night, provides light for all who believe so that when they see our good works, we can’t ... we must not be quiet.

The song silent night tells the story of a not so silent night, that encourages us to know that with the peace we have, even in the midst of chaos, we can sleep in heavenly peace.

Let us pray!