



Advent Vespers Devotional 2020

Sunday, December 20
Silent Night, Holy Night
Stanzas 1 & 2

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.

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!

— Joseph Mohr, 1792-1849; tr. John F. Young 1820-1885

Silent night, Holy night. These words begin one of the most well-known, well-loved Christmas carols. This hymn has a story and even legend of its own. An Austrian priest, Josef Mohr, brings his poem to musician friend Franz Gruber on Christmas Eve 1818 and by midnight Mass this carol is first sung accompanied by guitar.

The first stanza describes a mother and a child and a holy night marked by calm, silence and peace. Meanwhile back at the ranch, so to speak, the second stanza is more raucous. An angel describes the meaning of what's going on to shepherds who are quaking and shaking, with glories streaming light-show and a heavenly host singing. And then there is silence again.

Words say things, but words also do things. These words in this carol ironically speak and sing about silence. This carol creates a moment of holy silence even in the midst of sound. For some this carol evokes memories of times past and maybe brings a moist eye. Nothing wrong with that. The good news also is that experiencing this carol, singing these words brings us into a holy moment in the now. As one preacher described it, an eternal now.
Amen.

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