

**PRAYER:** O God, place your trumpet in our hands, and we will make a mighty sound! For unto the world a child is born; unto the world a Saviour is given. His hands will split the yoke of our burdens; his knee will snap the rod of our afflictions. He will establish peace upon the earth, breaking the bow and shattering the spear.

You have struck a spark, Lord. The refiner's fire is kindled in the darkness; an ember glows in the silent night. Unto the world a child is born; unto the world a Saviour is given. Place your trumpets in our hands, and we shall call the world to peace!

**OFFERTORY SENTENCE:** "And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother and they fell down and worshipped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh." (Matt. 2:11) Let us follow the Magi's example and honour the Christ child with our gifts.

**BLUE CANDLE INTRODUCTION:** Now is the time in the service when we take a few moments to remember that this festive season can be difficult for many people. Most often the memories Christmas stirs up remind us of those who we have loved who had meant so much to us, and who are now in the eternal hands of God. At the very center of our being is an awareness of an end to a valued relationship. Our hearts ache, our tears flow. We grieve because of their physical absence, but we also rejoice to have known that love.

We also light this blue candle together as a reminder that we do not stand alone in our grief. All around us this evening are brothers and sisters in Christ who share our pain and long to give comfort. In trying to rebuild our lives after our loss, God has provided us with a rich and diverse community from which we can derive hope, strength and love. Together we shall experience the grace God extends to us, in the full recognition that we are never alone. Let us now light our blue candle to remind us of the warmth and light that our fellowship brings to all of us especially those who walk through the shadow this Christmas. Let us now light our blue candle.

**BLUE CANDLE PRAYER:** Gracious, Compassionate God, even as we celebrate the joyous news of your Son's birth, we recognize that not every heart is finding rejoicing easy or even possible. For some, the sting of death and loss is so recent that our hope and assurance are threatened. Embrace us this evening, O God. Hold us close. Dispel the gloomy clouds that have overshadowed us. Grant us a peace that only you can give. And thank you, O God that we do not journey through these dark moments alone. Not only do you walk with us, but we walked together as a community. As one of us grieves, we all grieve. When one rejoices, we all rejoice. May the light of this candle, remind us that your Spirit is the true light of our souls. Amen.

**PASTORAL PRAYER:** O God, we have waited long in the fields of the night, keeping watch over the flocks, looking for signs of the morning. And what a sign you have given! The birth of a child! The birth of a Saviour! The birth of new life! Through your tender mercy, a new day has dawned, giving light to us who sit in darkness and dwell in the shadow of death, revealing the path of righteousness and guiding our feet unto the way of peace.

This child who has been born among us-he is the one with whom you are well pleased. And he has been born not among the mighty, but the lowly; not among the ruling, but those that are ruled; not among the rich, but the poor; not among the favoured, but the outcast.

## Christmas Eve 2022

If we are honest with you, he is not the Messiah we had expected from you, Lord. But there is the star dancing above him, and there is the angelic choir singing overhead: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace!" All creation celebrates the sign that has come to the nations, the salvation that has come to the peoples. The darkness has been broken; how can we doubt? The dawn is here; how can we not view the world in a different light?

We have run from the fields to see this thing that has happened; we have seen with our eyes-help us to understand with our hearts! O God, help us to know the time of our visitation, so that when the child, becomes a man, we might by his grace draw near to your heart and our eternal hope. In drawing us close by your Son, keep us safe, we pray from breaking your heart. May our lives draw their strength, their purpose and their hope from the one who came at Bethlehem and whose birth we rejoice and celebrate this night. Turn our weeping into rejoicing and may we truly learn the power of knowing for ourselves the Prince of Peace. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:** Somewhere in the night of our lives, a baby cries, and that cry is our hope. The grace of God has appeared for the salvation of the world. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace!

“Silent Night”

Europe in the early 1800s was a place of great war, turmoil, and upheaval. Even after the Napoleonic Wars officially ended in 1815, its effects continued to take their toll. The year 1816 was one in which national and municipal borders were divided, changed, and reset. Areas, such as the Principality of Salzburg, which had long been an ecclesiastical province of the church were put under national authority and secularized.

Many industries, and trades, that certain communities depended upon were decimated by the wars and never recovered – spinning the economies into economic depression. It was in the midst of these troubling times, and in one of these communities, in a small-town, an assistant pastor and Austrian Catholic Priest, penned the words to a poem that would one day echo through time and space.

On December 24, 1818 in the little village of Oberndorf, Austria, the whole town was preparing for the Christmas service, the highlight of the season. But Father Joseph Mohr was worried. The chapel organ was broken. It seems the local river had flooded, ruining the organ and heavy snowfall kept the repairman from the next village from being able to get there. On a sad note: the original church building Mohr served in was eventually destroyed by repeated floods. It was rebuilt as the “Silent [Night Chapel]”.

Without the organ, the Christmas service would therefore be devoid of the beloved Christmas music. But God always has a plan, and it was into these circumstances, it seems, that for months, Father Mohr had wanted to write a new song for Christmas. But the words had eluded him. As he sat at his desk pondering, he saw someone struggling through the snow towards his cabin. He opened the door, and saw a woman, who explained to him that a family from over the mountain had asked that he come and bless their first-born child who had just been born.

Bundling up, the priest made his way through the snow to their home. Upon his arrival, he saw the most beautiful scene. There lay the new mother in her bed, smiling as she and the father were looking into the little wooden crib beside the bed that held their newborn son. The priest admired the baby, and as requested, blessed him and his parents. It was then as he trudged home through the silent snow, he thought of how this family reminded him of the same scene in Bethlehem centuries before on the first Christmas night.

The words of the song came pouring in as joy filled Mohr’s heart. As he arrived home, he wrote them down. That morning he asked his friend Franz Gruber, to compose the tune to the song. This little congregation in Oberndorf heard that evening “Silent Night” for the first time. Gruber accompanied Mohr as they both sang. Silent Night, Holy Night, all is calm all is bright  
On yon Virgin Mother and Child, Holy Infant so tender and mild, Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in Heavenly peace.

Over the years, because the original manuscript had been lost, Mohr's name was forgotten, and although Gruber was known to be the composer, many people assumed the melody was composed by a famous composer.

## Christmas Eve 2022

And so it was variously attributed to Haydn, Mozart, or Beethoven. However, a manuscript was discovered in 1995, in Mohr's own handwriting, and dated by researchers as c. 1820. It states that Mohr wrote the words in 1816 when he was assigned to a pilgrim church in Maria Farr, Austria, and shows that the music was composed by Gruber in 1818. This is the earliest manuscript that exists and the only one in Mohr's handwriting.

However, as charming and beautiful as these words may be. That night that these words refer to was anything but silent and calm. On that night, Luke records for us, "A multitude of heavenly hosts praising God saying Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth among people with whom he is pleased." This is similar to the cry of the people upon Jesus' entry to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. Silence is not the usual response to the revelation of God's presence.

In Revelation, the heavenly host, and all those who stand before the throne, sing similar praise. On that night, the message spoken first through the prophets for hundreds of years was now spoken by Angels to a group of shepherds. This message is still spoken today in |God's word to His people. The message has three actions. The first is.

1. |There is Good News for all people and that includes you and I.
2. The Long-awaited Savior had come. The savior Israel had long desired.
3. Here is how you will find him. The shepherds found him where the angels had said he would be. We too can find him where he said he would be. Knocking on the door of our hearts waiting for us to let him in.
4. Finally, Isaiah tells us in Is. 9:6-7 the nature of the one born on the first Christmas night. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.

Silent Night is a beautiful hymn, but the truth of that sacred night in Bethlehem, is nothing to be silent about.