

## Silent Night-The Old Rugged Cross

By  
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There are two hymns that were played for the first time on the guitar: one out of convenience and the other out of necessity. *The Old Rugged Cross* vibrated to life in 1913 reminding us of the finished work of salvation. *Silent Night* quietly ushered in the Christmas Eve of 1818 describing so well the “fullness of time” of the Father’s plan. Both have been sung and played down through the ages, becoming the musical bookends of God’s glorious gift of His Son. Both songs supply us with a verbal picture of the beginning and the completion of our salvation in Christ.

George Bennard would author the words and music for *The Old Rugged Cross*, while in the birth of Silent Night, two men, Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber, would share the honor. Bennard strummed the strings at his kitchen table in Albion, Michigan, with an audience of only one, his wife. Mohr and Gruber played their song for the first time before the congregation of the church a ST. Nicholas in Oberndorf, Austria. Bennard, the Methodist evangelist, had found inspiration for his song in a vision of a cross, a bloodstained, old wooden one. For the Catholic priest, Mohr, his inspiration came from visiting the humble cottage of a poor woodcutter to bless a newborn baby. A vision of another birth and a wooden manger welled up in his heart and mind on the way back to the church. Arriving home, he put on paper what his heart was saying. Gruber, the church organist, would now have the privilege of composing the music for this newborn song.

These two great hymns have traveled around the world from their humble beginnings. *The Old Rugged Cross* gained popularity through the efforts of Billy Sunday, the great evangelist, and his song leader, Homer Rodeheaver, as Rody would share the song along the “sawdust trail.” *Silent Night* began its journey through the curiosity of the organ repairman who fixed the broken organ at St. Nicholas, explaining why a guitar was used that Christmas Eve. From there, the repairman gave the song to the Stasser family folk singers, who passed it on the Rainers, another Austrian family group, who eventually brought the song to America.

Both hymns have stood the test of time because of the message captured within the notes and lyrics. In a way, they are the bookends of the Christmas message. From the *Silent Night* that witnessed His quiet arrival to the raging afternoon that saw the agony of *The Old Rugged Cross*, Jesus was born to die. The gift of eternal life because of a sinless death is the message of Christmas. The challenge now is what we do with this message, either receive and live for all eternity or reject and be lost for all time. The decision is yours.