

December's hymn of the month

By Bill Dagle

Translated into over 300 languages, becoming Bing Crosby's bestselling version in the 1930's, *Silent Night*, 200 years old this Christmas, is more popular today than ever before. On Spotify, a digital music service, there are over 26,000 versions of the hymn. This would allow you to listen to a different version of *Silent Night* every night for the next 72 years. Unfortunately, some of the newer versions remove the name of Jesus for whom the song was written in the first place. This brings me to a most interesting and little known fact about *Silent Night* and its author, Joseph Mohr.

Joseph Mohr, born in Salzburg, Austria, was abandoned by his father leaving Joseph's mother to fend for herself. In contrast, our Savior, Jesus, was born in Bethlehem by no earthly father, but was loved and protected by His heavenly Father. Joseph was 26 years old when he was assigned as the assistant priest at the St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, Austria, through a special dispensation since he had no father. It was there that Joseph Mohr would give us the hymn. Jesus, from eternity past, was assigned to be the Savior of the world and take His place in Heaven as the High Priest because of an all gracious Father. It is there now that Jesus Christ fulfills the message given in Joseph's song. Both babies had different beginnings because of their fathers, but both were used of God to bring us the true meaning of Christmas.

The hymn arrived in America in December 1839 when an Austrian family group, the Rainers, sang *Silent Night* at the Trinity Church in New York City. Pastor Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber, the choir master, introduced *Silent Night* to the world on December 24, 1818. This December 24th marks the 200th anniversary of its debut. The original church, St. Nicholas in Oberndorf was destroyed by a flood. In 1937, a Silent Night Memorial Chapel was built over the place where the original altar stood. On November 29, 1992, a full size replica of the chapel was dedicated in Frankenmuth, Michigan, right here in America. The Bronner family were given permission by the city government of Oberndorf to simulate the original Silent Night Memorial Chapel in Frankenmuth.

Two hundred years old, and the message is still the same. On that silent night, as the world slept, God, the Father, would send His son to be the Savior of all mankind. The hymn has stood the test of time, and so has the Father's message, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord."

Silent night! Holy night! All is calm, all is bright, Round yon
Virgin and Child! Holy Infant, so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace.

Silent night! Holy light! Shepherds quake at the sight,
Glories stream from heaven afar, Heavenly hosts sing: "Alleluia;
Christ the Saviour is born, Christ the Saviour is born.

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.

Silent night! Holy night! Wondrous Star, lend thy light;
With the angels let us sing, Alleluia to our King;
Christ the Saviour is born, Christ the Saviour is born.

The hymn of the month for December: **Silent Night**

Now for the rest of the story:

On August 21, 2018, Linda and I had the opportunity to visit Frankenmuth, Michigan and see, first hand, the replica of the Silent Night Memorial Chapel. (See A 1,000 Words page for a pictorial journey.)

As I said earlier, there are 26,000 versions of the hymn so I've posted a couple of them to my new web page called, *Edison Phonograph*. One video is of Frederick Kinsley playing *Silent Night* on a Midmer-Losh pipe organ recorded in 1925. The Midmer-Losh Pipe Organ Company, located in Merrick, New York, would build the largest pipe organ in the world from 1929-1932. The organ is located in the Convention Center in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The second video is a cylinder record recorded in 1912 and played on an Edison Amberola phonograph dating back to 1915.

Last but not least, on December 5, we had the opportunity to be interviewed by a local CBS television station news anchor, Julia Dunn, who produced a two minute segment on *Silent Night* and the 200th anniversary of this Christmas hymn. (cbs6albany.com) We had a great time sharing the story with her and the capitol district area.

I don't think Mohr and Gruber realized what they had accomplished and that the hymn would be this popular 200 years later. Silent Night has stood the test of time and will do so until the baby born in Bethlehem returns and fulfills Revelation 19:16: "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." The message of the angels that first Christmas night, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, good will toward men," has yet to be enjoyed by this world; but it will be soon. His return could be just around the corner of HIS STORY.