

Do you know the story behind the hymn Silent Night? This famous Christmas carol was written in 1818 by Joseph Mohr who served at St. Nikolaus Church in a small village in Austria. There are all kinds of stories and legends about this hymn. One story was that the organ failed to work on Christmas Eve 1818, and Mohr wrote this hymn hoping that the church organist would be able to set it to music. Since the organ was broken, that organist took a guitar from the wall and used it to lead the singing of this new song. Whether that's entirely true, we probably don't know, and in the end, it doesn't really matter a whole lot. What matters isn't what happened in a small village in Austria 200 years ago, but what really matters are the events of that very first Christmas, what happened in a small village called Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, and why the Christ-child was born.

Silent Night has that line: "All is calm, all is bright." Does that feel like your life right now? I don't need to tell you the stress and the worry that so many people are experiencing throughout this year. The stress on healthcare workers. The stress on those who have other conditions that would make getting COVID serious. The stress on small businesses. The stress on people isolated and alone. I would guess that you didn't receive any Christmas cards this year with the message: "Christmas 2020: All is calm, all is bright." It doesn't feel that way.

From all outward appearances, I'm not quite sure if everything seemed so calm and silent on that very first Christmas. We heard again Luke 2, and think about what's happening here. Mary and Joseph had to travel about 100 miles to get from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It's hard for pregnant women to travel in airplanes and in cars after a certain point today. Can you imagine traveling that far by foot or by donkey? In Bethlehem, there are so many people that there's not a place for them to stay. They used a manger, a feeding trough, to place Jesus in. The child in Mary's womb was perfect and without sin, but that doesn't mean giving birth was a walk in the park. They couldn't go to the local hospital...we're not told of a midwife or a doctor assisting in the delivery. That probably wasn't so calm and silent for Mary. And then at some point after Jesus was born, some strangers, some shepherds, show up. I would imagine it was exhausting, it was a little chaotic, it probably wasn't completely silent and calm. Maybe that's a feeling many of us have right now.

Yet, you get to this beautiful and wonderful description of Mary in Luke 2:19. **19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.** What sort of things would she have treasured? What sort of things would she have pondered about?

I imagine she regularly thought about the angel Gabriel visiting her and telling her that despite being a virgin, she would give birth to a son, and that he would be the Messiah. I imagine she thought back to the time she visited her cousin Elizabeth, and the reaction that baby in Elizabeth's womb John had when she entered. I imagine she thought about the trip to Bethlehem and how difficult it would be but also how she trusted the Lord keep his promises. I imagine that like any mother, she held her baby with joy but unlike other mothers recognizing that this child wasn't an ordinary child. I imagine she thought about those shepherds who came and told them that the angels announced that in the town of David a Savior had been born – that he is Christ the Lord. I imagine she thought ahead to the future and wondered what exactly this child, this Messiah would do to rescue his people. Even though that first Christmas probably wasn't as outwardly silent or calm as the hymn suggests, Mary had a calmness and a peace as she looked into the eyes of her Savior.

Do you think about these things? Do you treasure these things? Do you ponder them in your heart? Unfortunately, I sometimes don't. Sometimes our Christmases aren't always so silent or calm either. Sometimes they're filled with conflict and fighting. Sometimes they're filled with loneliness. Sometimes a stomach bug passes through the house.

The more Christmases you spend here on earth, the the more you realize that the lights in a few weeks will be gone, the trees will be on the curb waiting to be picked up, the decorations will be put away. As wonderful as those can be, they don't provide a lasting, continual comfort and peace in our lives. They don't take care of our greatest problem – the problem of our sin. Because as Isaiah reminded us, we were a people walking in darkness. The darkness of sin

and of unbelief. That's not true of merely the world we live in, but by nature, that was true of our hearts. And no amount of wrapping paper or tinsel or decoration would be enough to fix that problem, to fix the darkness, to fix our sin.

And so what does God do? He sends a light into this world. He sends his own Son into this world. This evening especially, we think about how marvelous that truth is. That long, long ago in the Garden of Eden, God made a promise that the offspring of Eve would reverse everything. And in the OT, he gives specific promises about this offspring. That he would be a descendant of David, that he would be born in a town called Bethlehem, that he would be born of a virgin, that he would be rejected and would suffer for our sins, but that he would also rise again and see the light of life.

Tonight, we think about that, at just the right time, God made it happen. God kept his promise. He used unbelieving ruler like Caesar Augustus to keep his promise. He would use a census to bring Mary to the town of Bethlehem. He would use shepherds to spread the word that the Savior would be born. It all happened at the right time.

Tonight, we also think about why this matters so much: **But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law that we might receive the full rights of sons.** Jesus placed himself under God's law, and he did it for us. He did it to live the perfect life that we have not lived. He did it with one goal in mind so that one day the perfect Son of God would offer his life for us on the cross. So that we would receive the full rights of sons, so that we would be heirs of a greater joy, a greater gift, a greater inheritance. One that is ours through faith, through trust in him.

I think one of the things I worry about in the world we live in today is losing chances to stop and think and reflect. With phones today, the idea of sitting and thinking is happening less and less. That's why I always enjoy driving to visit someone who lives 30 minutes away or farther. That's why I enjoy mowing my yard in the summer, and why I sometimes enjoy shoveling in the winter. It allows you to stop and think.

My dear friends, Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. This was more than just a mother making a mental scrap book of her newborn child. This was a believer knowing that things would never be the same after that very Christmas, not just for her but for the entire world. And because of that, even if the entire evening was painful, stressful, chaotic, and tiring, she knew that her son, the child she was holding in her arms, came to be her Savior and give her peace with God.

He gives you that same peace too. In the midst of an outwardly chaotic Christmas or in the midst of a quiet, calm one, we remember why today matters so much. A Savior is born for us. A Savior who takes away our failures. A Savior who removes our sin. A Savior who gives us peace with God. A Savior who gives you something that won't need to be thrown away, fixed, or repair. He gives you salvation. He gives you heaven.

And so the events of that first Christmas aren't things for us to think about only once a year. They are not merely part of some sort of tradition that we follow. These things are things to think about and to treasure and to ponder every day. That in the manger Mary, Joseph, and those shepherds don't merely see the face of a child, but they see the face of God as the Son wraps himself in human flesh. And that as this child grows, he's no ordinary child, but he is the perfect Son of God who walked always in line with God's will and God's commands. And that his suffering and death aren't merely a sad story about a good man being unjustly accused, but they are our hope and confidence to know our sins are forgiven. And that his resurrection from the grave isn't merely some fairy tale, but that it actually happened, and it gives confidence in the face of death.

These are things to think about...so let's think about them: **Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born for you. He is Christ the Lord.** Merry Christmas.