

SESSION 1: SILENT NIGHT

Watch the video or read the script together as a group; then discuss the following questions. Keep in mind the questions are meant to prompt conversation, so don't feel the need to use or discuss every question.

BIBLE REFERENCES

Luke 2; Matthew 1:21-23; Philippians 2:7

QUESTIONS

1. ICEBREAKER: What do you imagine the atmosphere was like in the stable the night of Jesus' birth?
2. What are characteristics of holiness or of someone who is holy?
3. What does the phrase "dawn of redeeming grace" mean to you? Discuss the significance of this new dawn of redemption.
4. The video mentions that one of the reasons why the night of Christ's birth was holy was because *He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant*. What should our response be to this, that Christ would lower Himself to such a degree for the sake of our sins? How do the lyrics of *Silent Night* highlight additional aspects of holiness in Jesus' birth?
5. The prophecy concerning the birth of Jesus mentioned in Matthew 1:21-23 is from Isaiah 7:14. Read Isaiah 7. Is there a connection between these verses and the coming of Jesus? (Perhaps a Bible commentary may be helpful in discussing this.) Why does Matthew record that the prophecy found in Isaiah 7 has been fulfilled?
6. Why do you think this carol has become such a beloved Christmas standard? What is it about this song that resonates with you personally? What emotions does the song *Silent Night* stir within you when you hear it each Advent season?
7. In Matthew 1:21-23, we read that God's Son is called Jesus because *He will save His people from their sins* (the Hebrew roots for the name Jesus mean "to deliver" or "to rescue"). What has Jesus saved you from?

[illegible]

8. *Silent Night*'s humble beginnings reflect the humble circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth. How can we bring more humility and simplicity into a season that has become so commercial and often times overwhelming? How can you make your season of Advent a season of silence, quietness, holiness, and meditation?
9. PERSONAL TAKE-HOME: *Silent Night* was written in the midst of great hardship for many Austrians. The Napoleonic wars had recently ended and the ash from a volcanic eruption in Indonesia had caused famine across Europe a couple of years before. This carol reminded these afflicted people of the hope that proceeds from Jesus' birth. Throughout the week, set aside some time to reflect how the Savior's birth has brought you hope, joy and peace, also in the midst of trying times. Sing all the verses of *Silent Night* this week, either alone or with your family.

SILENT NIGHT

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,
Shepherd quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar;
Heavenly hosts sing alleluia.
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night,
Wondrous star, lend thy light.
With the angels let us sing
Alleluia to our King.
Christ the Savior is born!
Christ the Savior 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.

SCRIPT & ADDITIONAL CONTEXT

SESSION 1: SILENT NIGHT

In this session, we'll turn our attention to perhaps the most famous Christmas carol ever written, Silent Night. Let's begin by taking a brief look at the history of this beloved carol.

Silent Night - or *Stille Nacht* in the original German - was written in 1818. Joseph Mohr, a Catholic priest at the Church of St. Nicholas in Oberndorf, Austria, needed a carol for the Christmas Eve mass the next evening. With a lack of quality Christmas hymns at his disposal, Mohr decided to create his own hymn. Only hours before it was to be sung for the first time, he visited the church's organist, Franz Gruber, asking him if he could set to music a poem that he had written depicting the night of Christ's birth. Gruber obliged, and quickly composed a melody to go with Mohr's lyrics. Because the church organ was broken, he arranged the song to be played on a guitar. That evening at Midnight Mass, both Mohr and Gruber led the congregation at St. Nicholas in the first rendition of *Silent Night*. The hymn made a deep impact on those who heard it that evening, even as it has on succeeding generations. The passing of time seems to only add to its appeal. It endures in part because it brings a sense of inner calm to the often-overwhelming hustle and bustle of the Christmas season. Given all of the noise surrounding Christmas and throughout the year, the title of the song in and of itself speaks to people. We desire and seek after moments of silence and stillness; moments of isolation and meditation.

Whether the night of Christ's birth can be accurately described as silent or not, however, is perhaps in question. After all, in Luke 2 we read of a crowded inn, hurrying shepherds, flocks of sheep, and a multitude of the heavenly host praising God. What can't be questioned is the holiness surrounding the birth of Jesus, beautifully summarized in Matthew 1:21-23: *And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins. So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us."*

God came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ to save us from our sins. He, the sovereign King of King and Lord of Lords, the One exalted above all and to whom every knee must bow, was born in the humblest of circumstances. As it says in Philippians 2:7, *He made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant*. This was indeed a holy night.

If we take a deeper look at the lyrics for "Silent Night," we quickly see that Mohr understood the holiness surrounding Christ's birth. In the first verse, for instance, the virgin birth is alluded to, and Christ is described as holy: *All is calm, all is bright 'round yon virgin mother and child. Holy infant, so tender and mild*. In the second verse, three separate events illuminate the holiness of the Savior's birth - the shepherds quaking at the sight of it, the glories that stream from heaven afar, and the heavenly hosts singing alleluia. In the third verse, Mohr leaves no doubt when it comes to the holiness of Christ and of His birth - *Son of God, love's pure light, radiant beams from Thy holy face, with the dawn of redeeming grace*. This isn't just any baby - this is the Son of God. And this isn't just any birth - this is a birth that signifies the dawn of redeeming grace. With sin comes death, but with Christ comes grace. Paul's words in Romans 6:14 encapsulate the significance of this new dawn of redemption: *Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace* (NLT translation).

God gave us the greatest gift in Jesus Christ. He came into the middle of our noisy world, and brought us everlasting hope, love, joy, and peace. In the remaining moments of this Advent and Christmas season, let us continue to see clearly the unparalleled value of this great gift.