
The Story of A Christmas Song

All over the world, this week, people are singing the same song, although the words are different. But in each language the words bring the same gladness. Some songs are more than words and a tune. They have been on so many lips and in so many hearts that they have come to life. Silent Night is just such a song, and many people think of it as a folk song. But it isn't. In itself it is a wonderful Christmas story.

On Dec. 24, 1818, in an old village in the Austrian Alps, Father Joseph Mohr sat in his study, working on his Christmas sermon. It was evening, and already some of the parishoners had begun to arrive for Midnight Mass. A knock at the door, and a request that he come immediately to bless a new-born infant, took him to the edge of the village. He entered the poor charcoal maker's hut, blessed the child and mother and set out for the parish church. Walking through the silent snow, it seemed as though the Christmas miracle had just happened before his eyes. Even the forest creatures seemed to know and keep the peace of the holy night. Then, from all the mountain villages near and far, bells began to ring and echo from the mountain walls.

Father Mohr offered Midnight Mass, and then went home. Unable to sleep, he sat down at his desk and put his experience on paper -- the event and the atmosphere of the evening. Next day, he showed it to the village schoolmaster, Franz Gruber, who set it to music. Since the church organ was broken, Gruber reached for the only instrument available -- an old guitar.

And so, on Christmas Day, 1818, as the children gathered outside Father Mohr's window, they heard the priest and the schoolmaster singing a song that was destined to be heard in all the lands where there is Christmas: "Silent Night, Holy Night..."

A few days after Christmas, one of the most famous organ builders of the district, Karl Mauracher, stopped at the village. He was a friendly man, with a long, bushy beard, dressed in Tyrolean clothes on which silver buttons winked. He repaired the sick organ, and then watched as Franz Gruber seated himself on the bench and began to play. As Gruber slipped into the new Christmas melody, he thought it sounded much better than on the guitar.

The organ builder listened quietly and then asked: "Where did you get that song? I've never heard it. Would you mind if I took it with me? Folks back where I live would greatly appreciate it".

Father Mohr and Gruber both assured the organ builder that he was welcome to their song. Mauracher thanked his friends, said good-bye, and set off across the mountains. As time went by, the organ builder visited hundreds of towns throughout Austria. And because he liked to sing, the new Christmas song spread quickly from valley to valley. The children learned it first, then the grownups; and in no time at all the mountain folk were singing Silent Night. Because Father Mohr and Franz Gruber had been too modest to claim the song for their own, Mauracher could not say who had written it. It became known as the "Song From Heaven".

Then 36 years later (1854), the son of Franz Gruber led music authorities to his aged father who revealed the authentic story of the origin of Silent Night.

QUICKIES -- If you missed the offering for the orphans and the poor, yesterday at Mass, the Bulletin (117 Dillon) will see that your gift gets to the intended ones... Keep in mind that Monday, Wednesday and Friday of this week are Ember Days.

PRAYERS REQUESTED -- Deceased: friend of Jim Fisher of Fisher hall.