

# LAUGH AND LEARN

## THE STORY OF SILENT NIGHT WORLD'S FAVORITE CHRISTMAS CAROL



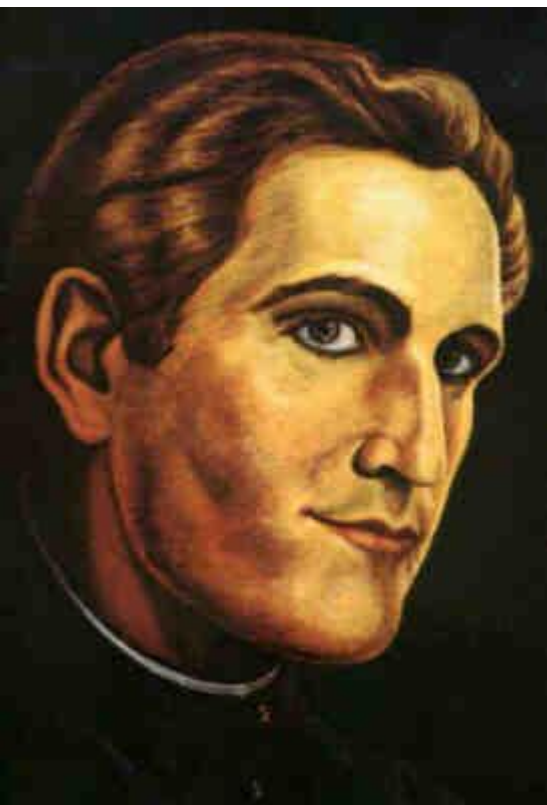
### THE LEARN

But before we learn about Silent Night, enjoy this surprising shopping event

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXh7JR9oKVE&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SXh7JR9oKVE&feature=player_embedded)

#### Father Joseph Mohr, Parish Priest

It's the first line from a poem this young Austrian priest wrote two years before. Now he can't get the phrase out of his mind. "Silent night, holy night."



Tonight is Christmas Eve and St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, north of Salzburg, will be filled with people. Father Joseph Mohr has a message for his people, but he needs a carol, something to make this service extra-special. And he has a big problem; the organ needs to be repaired. The pipes were rusted, the bellows mildewed. The organ had been wheezing and growing quieter for months, and Father Joseph had been hoping it would hold together until the organ builder arrived to repair it in the spring. But now, on December 23, 1818, the organ had finally quit working completely. What will Christmas Eve be like with no music?

Silent night, holy night, All is calm, all is bright...

"I need a tune and a guitar!" he thinks, "I wonder if Franz will help me. I hope it's not too late." Franz Gruber is the schoolteacher in the nearby village of Arnsdorf -- a gifted musician, organist and guitar player. "Franz will help me!" he says to himself. "He can't resist a musical challenge."

## Franz Gruber, Schoolteacher and Organist

The snow is crunchy underfoot as he makes his way towards Arnsdorf, just a 20 minute walk. "Silent night, holy night ... silent night, holy night." The rhythm of the words are felt with each step. At his knock Elizabeth opens the door. "Father Mohr, how nice of you to stop by. Franz will be glad to see you." As she takes his coat and ushers him in, Mohr can hear Franz playing his guitar.

"Franz, do you remember that poem I told you about: 'Silent Night'?" asks Mohr. "I know it's late, but could you put a tune to it? I want to sing it tonight for Christmas Eve."

Gruber's face lights up. A challenge! A song! He takes the lyrics from the priest and begins to say them over and over, looking for a cadence. Then he hums a line and scratches it down.

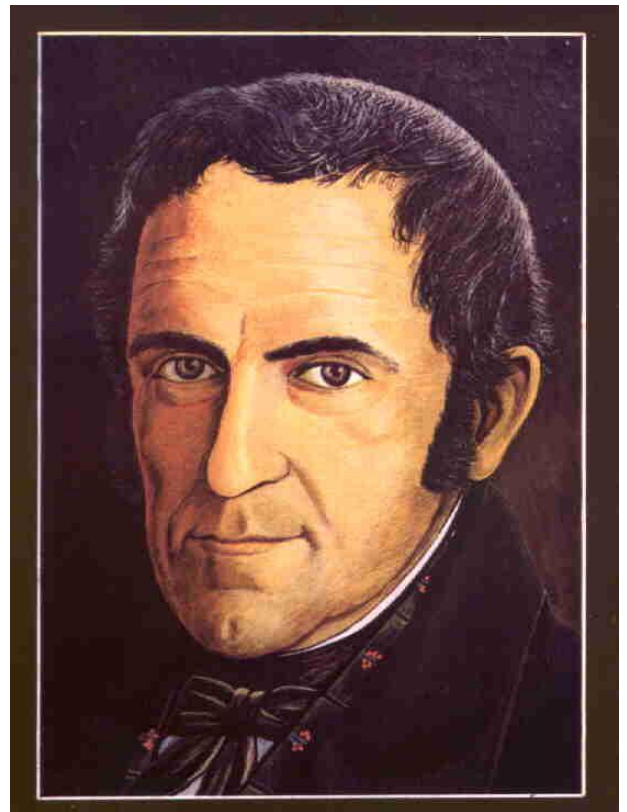
Mohr begins to play with the children. Within an hour, Gruber has a melody and is working out the chords on his guitar. "Father, how does this sound?" he calls and begins to sing:

Silent night, holy night,  
All is calm all is bright...

He stops to make a correction in the manuscript, and then continues:

...'Round yon virgin, Mother and Child,  
Holy infant so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace! Sleep in heavenly peace!

Father Mohr is ecstatic. On the second verse Gruber's deep voice is joined by Mohr's rich tenor. Elizabeth, baby on her hip, now joins them on the last verse. The song fills their home with its gentle words and memorable melody.



## Christmas Eve

That night, December 24, 1818, the song fills St. Nicholas Church at Midnight Mass. Mohr sings tenor, Gruber bass, with the choir joining in while Mohr accompanies on the guitar since the organ was silent. By the time the last notes fade away, the worshipers are whispering with joy and wonder at the song. On Christmas Day, the song is being hummed and sung in dozens of homes around Oberndorf. "Silent night, holy night."

In Oberndorf, they would sing their beloved carol again and again each Christmas. The song might have stayed right there except for an organ builder named Karl Mauracher who came to Arnsdorf and Oberndorf for organ repairs in 1819 and made several trips over the next few years, finally building a new organ for St. Nicholas in 1825.



## The Song Finds Its Way to Emperors and Kings -- and to America

Mauracher carried the song to the Ziller Valley east of Innsbruck, where he shared it with two families of travelling folk singers, the Rainers and the Strassers, who began to sing it as part of their regular repertoire.

Three years later they sang it for royalty. Emperor Francis I of Austria and his ally Czar Alexander I of Russia were staying in the nearby castle of Count Dönhoff (now Bubenberg Castle). The Rainer Family performed the carol and were invited to Russia for a series of concerts.

In 1834 the Strasser Family Singers sang "Silent Night" for King Frederick William IV of Prussia. He was so thrilled with what the Strassers called their "Song of Heaven," that he commanded it to be sung by his cathedral choir every Christmas Eve. It spread through Europe and in 1839 the Raniers took the song to America as the "Tyrolean Folk Song." Since then it has been translated into more than 300 languages.

### Why Is "Silent Night" So Popular?

Why has "Silent Night" become our most beloved carol? Is it the words -- tender, intimate? Or the tune -- so peaceful, so memorable? "Silent Night" is quiet and reflective, calling us to meditate on the scene. The gentle words and simple melody create an oasis of peace.



"All is calm, all is bright."

It calls us to dwell on the Madonna and Child.

"Round yon Virgin, mother and Child,  
Holy Infant, so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace."

You *feel* as the "shepherds quake at the sight." You can *imagine* as "heavenly hosts sing Alleluia." And you begin to sing "Alleluia to the King" right along with them.

### Early score with autograph of Franz Gruber

Rays of backlit brilliance highlight many religious paintings, but here the picture of light is painted in words:

"Glories stream from heaven afar...."

"Son of God, love's pure light,  
Radiant beams from Thy holy face...."

Just Who is in this manger? What is the significance of this birth? What is Christmas about -- really? Perhaps most of all, "Silent Night" is beloved because it reminds us in its simple, but elegantly clear way, the truth behind it all -- the truth that changes everything:



"Christ, the Savior is born!"

Sing it again this Christmas and let its gentle peace wash over you and its bold assertion renew your soul.

"Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!

"Jesus, Lord, at thy birth!"

## THE LINKS

**Albano Carrisi, Karel Gott, Eva Urbanová, Miroslav Donutil - Tichá noc**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttdepe\\_h59w](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttdepe_h59w)

**Celtic Woman - Silent Night** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JtQr81k3TSk>

**Olivia Newton John - Silent Night**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6P3fCDQVMI>

**Silent Night... Elvis Presley**

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZUZ\\_twxVwY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZUZ_twxVwY)

**Karel Gott - STILLE NACHT - TICHÁ NOC**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jdKN-C7kzdA>

**Vánoční koleda: Tichá noc (Silent night)**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o-2XkVDIb3Y>

**Ticha noc - trio**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1yEnH9ai26o>

## THE LAUGHS

Mom, can I have a dog for Christmas?

[No, you can have turkey like everyone else.]

What nationality is Santa Claus?

[North Polish.]

Judge: "What are you charged with?"

Prisoner: "Doing my Christmas shopping early."

Judge: "That's not an offense. How early were you doing this shopping?"

Prisoner: "Before the store opened."

What's the best thing to put into a Christmas cake?

[Your teeth.]



Why are Christmas trees like bad knitters?  
[They both drop their needles.]

What did Adam say on the day before Christmas?  
[It's Christmas, Eve!]



Just before Christmas, there was an honest politician, a kind lawyer and Santa Claus travelling in a lift of a very posh hotel. Just before the doors opened they all noticed a \$5 bill lying on the floor. Which one picked it up??  
[Santa of course, the other two don't exist!]

Patient: Doctor, doctor, I keep thinking I'm a Christmas bell.  
Doctor: Take these pills and if they don't work, give me a ring.