

Is it really a silent and holy night?

December 23, 2018

In 1816, it was Christmas eve at Obendorf, Austria, a young priest Joseph Mohr was very concerned. He found out that mice had eaten into the air bag of the church organ. It meant no instrument to accompany the songs that required the organ music at the Christmas eve service. So he quickly wrote a simple poem of 6 stanzas, celebrating the glory of the birth of Jesus Christ. His friend Franz Gruber made it into a song so that they could sing that night without the organ. They had no idea that this song would go around the world and become possibly the greatest Christmas carol of all time "Silent Night, Holy 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

However, but much of the world today is not silent, and it is not holy. It is a world of political, economic, and social turmoil, standing on the brink of Armageddon. If there's one word that seems to describe our world and its mood today, it is "fear." It seems like every day the headlines scream of some new crisis in our world that threatens to plunge us into next chaos.

On a personal level, it is not much better. The marriage that is falling apart; the heartache of a broken relationship; the despair of a lost job; the threat of illness; the slavery of a drug, sex, or alcohol addiction that seems unbreakable.

It seems that "Silent Night, Holy Night" is a distant romanticized dream or even a false hope that vanishes in the face of the realities of life. But there can be peace in our hearts when we turn to the only true source of peace: the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

A. A COMMAND OF "DO NOT BE AFRAID"

Luke 2:9-11 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Think back to that first Christmas about a little more than 2,000 years ago. It was probably late at night on the field, just a few miles outside the little village of Bethlehem. The stars shone like sparkling jewels in the dark sky, and a little group of tired shepherds had settled down to sleep. They had no reason to expect that this night would be different from any other night, just as you may think that nothing is going to change in your own life in such a drastic way. But God had other plans. This was the night that would be the most important night in human history, the night when God Himself would come to earth.

Can you imagine the fear that must have gripped the shepherds' hearts? But the first words of the angels to those frightened shepherds were, "Do not be afraid" or "fear not" in some of the different versions of the Bible. Why? Because Christ has come, and He makes all the difference and we don't need to be bound by fear and despair. We can know that all can be calm and all can be bright because of Christ as the song "Silent Night, Holy Night" stated.

The vast majority of the world celebrates Christmas once again in the midst of crises in every continent. Millions of people, if they have to think about it carefully, are not sure if they can survive through the potential world war III, worldwide economic melt-down, or massive natural disasters, like earthquakes. Because we humans are prone to worry, prone to fear, prone to hide behind that "All-Is-Good" mask.

4 times in the Gospel accounts of Christmas, the angels use that expression, "*Do not be afraid*":

1) Zechariah, an old man, was filled with fear when he was told by the angel that he would be the father of John the Baptist, who would be the forerunner of the Messiah.

2) Mary was told by the angel that she would have the awesome privilege of bearing the Son of God. Fear filled her at first, but the angel said, "*Do not be afraid, Mary*" in Luke 1.

3) Joseph, betrothed to the virgin Mary, was filled with fear and embarrassment when he discovered she was pregnant. But the angel declared, "*Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit,*" in Matthew 1:20.

4) The shepherds in the field which we already read.

And that is what God says to us today. No matter what our fear may be, He says to us right now, "*Do not be afraid.*" We don't need to be afraid, because Christ has come.

B. DIFFERENT KINDS OF FEAR

There are different kinds of fear. Not all fear is wrong. It is right for a child to fear a hot stove or a sharp knife, because those can harm him. It is right for us also to fear sin and satan, because they can bring devastation.

Soldiers and law enforcement officers have fears just like the rest of us. If they don't have fear, they become careless and they get killed. I like what the late great actor John Wayne said, "Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway."

The Bible also tells us to fear God. It does not mean that we are to be in terror of Him, shrinking from Him and even fleeing from Him – although we should fear His judgment – but it does mean that we're to have a reverence and respect for Him, knowing that He is holy and all powerful.

The angels tell us, "*Do not be afraid.*" Why? Because there is no longer any reason to be gripped and enslaved by fear. Think of the fears that so easily assault us. There is the fear of problems we face and what might happen to us.

I don't know where you are with your fear. I am not discounting your fear as nothing. Whether it is the fear of being ridiculed by others at school because you are different; or it might be the fear of illness that threatens your health badly, even in terminal illness; or it can be the fear of financial woes.

Jesus declared, "*In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,*" in John 16:33. He invites you today to bring your fear and your burdens to Him. He also said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" in Matthew 11:28.

And there is the fear of loneliness. This Christmas might be the first Christmas without your loved one. But we're never alone when we know Christ as our Savior and Lord. He has promised, *"Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age"* in Matthew 28:20. You were created for fellowship with God, and when you come to Christ, He makes you a child of God. You have a special relationship with Him, and nothing can take that away, because Christ made it possible through His death on the cross.

Then there's the fear of death. There was another time in the Bible when the angel came and said, *"Do not be afraid."* It was spoken to the women who came to the tomb of Jesus early on that first Easter morning and discovered the tomb was empty. *"Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen"* in Matthew 28:5-6.

Christ is the answer to death. By His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, He took away the sting of death. He took away our sins by dying on the cross in our place, and by putting your faith in Him as your Lord and Savior, you can know the joy of forgiveness and peace with God.

Christmas that celebrates the birth of our Lord Jesus was just the beginning for all of us. Ahead was the cross that gives us salvation through His death, and beyond the cross was the empty tomb of Jesus that was the proof of His resurrection so that we who are born-again Christians would have it, too.

Christ has come to take away the source of our fears. Fears are real. Christ does not tell us that we should simply cheer up and they'll all go away. It's right to fear death if we do not know Christ. It is right to fear loneliness or the problems that seem to overwhelm us, because those things are very real. But so is Christ, and when we realize that He has dealt with sin and made it possible for us to be reconciled to God, then we do not need to be paralyzed by fear any longer.

Instead, we should do what the shepherds did: Come to Christ. Come to Him with our sins and cast them at His feet, then we can know the true meaning of Silent Night, Holy Night. Then we can know what the Bible calls the peace of God that surpasses all understanding.

The presence of fear does not mean you have no faith. Fear visits everyone. But make your fear a visitor and not a resident.

Jesus promised, *"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"* in John 14:27.

Christmas tells us what it cost God to save the world: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son."* Christ is God's greatest gift to the world. The Scripture says, *"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"* in 2 Corinthians 9.

However, the hope that was given to those shepherds on that first Christmas night is available only to those who believe. To know the forgiveness of our sins, joy, peace, and power that come through Christ, we must personally receive Him by faith. Faith must be real if the heart is to be changed.

There are many of you who long for peace in your own hearts this Christmastime. You, too, can meet God at the foot of the cross and find the peace that you have searched for so long.

You say, "What do I have to do?" Simple! You have to turn from your sins, receive Christ as your Lord and Savior and commit your life to Him. He will come into your heart, and this Christmas you can spend knowing the Christ of Christmas for the first time.

Whatever your need, Jesus can meet it. Whatever the desires and longings of your heart, Christ can touch your life and transform you and make you a new person according to His will. I'm going to ask you to make that commitment and that decision this morning. What a wonderful time of the year to say "yes" to Jesus Christ and let Him change your life.

Heavenly Father, I am a sinner. I know that my sin has separated me from you. I am sorry for my sin. I want to turn from my sin. Please forgive me. I now believe Jesus Christ is Your Son; I believe He died on the cross for my sin and you raised Him to life. I want to trust Him as my Savior and follow Him as my Lord from this day forward, forevermore. Lord, I put my trust in You and surrender my life to You. Please come into my life and fill me with Your Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name. Amen.