

Do you know the story behind the beloved Christmas carol “Silent Night”? The words were written in 1816 by an Austrian pastor who was serving a church in the Alps. However, the carol didn’t come together for two more years.

In 1818, a group of traveling performers arrived in the village where Josef Mohr was the associate pastor. They came to put on a drama about the birth of Christ, but there was a problem. The church’s organ was under repair. So, they went to a member’s home and performed there.

Mohr was in attendance and was deeply moved by the performance. On the way home, he stopped to look down on the peace of the snow-covered village and drank in the cold, silent night. He remembered a poem he had written a couple of years earlier about the night when the long-expected Son of God was born, a night not unlike that night. He knew that he wanted his congregation to hear and sing it the next night at the Christmas Eve service.

There was a problem, however. He had words, but no music, and no organ on which to play the music. He needed music written for a guitar. He went to see the church organist and asked him to compose music for the poem to be sung later that night at the service. Later that night! The organist, Franz Xaver Gruber, just had hours in which to compose the music.

That night, the congregation in that small Austrian village heard the carol “Silent Night” for the first time. I know it was magical.

Some weeks later, a well-known organ builder came to repair the church’s organ. He invited Herr Gruber to play something to test the instrument. Gruber sat down and began playing “Silent Night.” The organ builder was so impressed that he asked for copies and took them with him.

From there, the rest is history. Some popular singers incorporated the song into their repertoire and sang it across Europe, captivating audiences. In 1838, they first sang it in America, and in 1863, it was translated into English.

Today, “Silent Night” remains the most popular Christmas hymn, and no Christmas Eve service is complete until it is sung. It has been translated into more than 300 languages.

“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.”