

Silent Night! Holy Night!

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening, for a short while, and with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to the second portion of Scripture that we read, Matthew chapter 1.

Matthew chapter 1, and if we read again at verse 22. Matthew chapter 1, at verse 22, where Matthew is explaining the birth narrative of Jesus, and then he says in verse 22, all this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

If you remember last Lord's Day, we began by asking the question, what is the gospel according to Christmas carols? What is the gospel according to Christmas carols?

And as you know, we were considering the impact and the influence of singing Christmas carols, because at this time of year, many people enjoy singing Christmas carols.

[1 : 20] And we should encourage people to sing Christmas carols, because they're not actually an obstacle to the gospel, but an opportunity to share the gospel. And I've mentioned to you already that there was this article written in 2015 called The Gospel According to Christmas Carols.

And the article, just to quote it to you again, it said, we call them Christmas carols, but they're really Christian hymns. They celebrate the incarnation of our Lord and Savior.

For a few weeks each December, these profound songs of worship become part of the holiday atmosphere, and our society's pervasive interest in them provides us with a unique opportunity to share the gospel.

It's the perfect time to explain the meaning of these songs to those who don't know Christ and share the good news of the gospel with them.

And that's what I'd like us to do again this evening. I want us to look at another Christmas carol and see that it seeks to share the gospel with us.

[2 : 25] We've discovered already that Christmas carols, they are full of theology. They're full of Christian theology. We saw that last Lord's Day with Isaac Watts' evangelistic prayer, where he said, joy to the world, the Lord has come.

Let earth receive her king. Let every heart prepare him room. And heaven and nature sing. Then last Lord's Day in the evening, we saw it in Wesleyan Whitfield's evangelistic proclamation, where they said, hark the herald angels sing.

Glory to the newborn king. And then on Wednesday evening, we were looking at John Francis Wade's evangelistic plea, where he says, O come, all ye faithful.

O come, all ye faithful. And each of these Christmas carols, they were written out of this desire to teach sound doctrine through song. They were to teach sound doctrine through song to poor and illiterate people.

And so this evening, I want us to consider another well-known Christmas carol. As I mentioned, it's called Silent Night. Silent Night, Holy Night. On Wednesday evening, I hope you'll come on Wednesday evening, we're going to be looking at another Christmas carol, which is O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.

[3 : 42] And then God willing, next Lord's Day morning, Christmas Day morning, we'll be considering Once in Royal David's City. But this evening, we're looking at the Christmas carol, Silent Night.

And as you can see, I hope you all picked up your sheet on the way in. I hope the doormen handed it to you. As you can see, there are three verses, and so there are three headings this evening.

Three verses, three headings. So the mother, the manger, and the message. The mother, the manger, and the message. So first of all, the mother.

We'll look at verse one of the Christmas carol. It says, 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. Now, in order for us to appreciate this Christmas carol fully, I want to take you back in time.

[4 : 45] I want to take you back over 200 years to the year 1818. And I want us to travel to the beautiful and very scenic country of Austria.

I don't know if you've ever been to Austria. I'd love to go to Austria. But we're going to travel to the small Austrian city of Orbendorf. Orbendorf. It's about 10 miles north of the city of Salzburg. And Orbendorf is actually near to the border of Germany. It overlooks the mountain range that we know as the Alps. And this small Austrian city of Orbendorf, in that city, there's a small parish church in 1818.

It was the parish of St. Nicholas. The parish of St. Nicholas. And boys and girls, if you remember this morning, we mentioned a man who used to drop off bags of gold coins called Nicholas. And so this church was known as the parish church of St. Nicholas. But on the 24th of December, 1818, so it was Christmas Eve, 1818, and in the parish church of St. Nicholas, what was taking place that night was the first performance of Silent Night, Holy Night.

[5 : 59] And of course, as it's Austria, the Christmas carol wasn't being sung in English, boys and girls. It was being sung in German.

It's been sung in German. Now, I'm going to try pronouncing this German. Stille Nacht. Heilige Nacht. I'm probably getting it wrong. But Silent Night, Holy Night.

And the Christmas carol was written by a young minister called, as it says there on the sheet, Joseph Moore. He had actually written the Christmas carol two years earlier in 1816. But it wasn't until 1818 that this man called Franz Gruber, he was the local school teacher and also the local church organist, he composed the tune that would accompany this well-known Christmas carol, a tune that we're all familiar with nowadays.

It's the tune that still goes to it. And so on Christmas Eve, 1818, that was the first performance of Silent Night, Holy Night. But the musical accompaniment that night wasn't the church organ, but a guitar.

And the reason it was a guitar and not the church organ was due to the fact that St. Nicholas Church, it's located, or it was located, right beside a river. And it was beside a river that had recently flooded.

[7 : 22] In fact, St. Nicholas Church was later destroyed by another flooding, and the church had to be rebuilt further away from the river. And when the church was rebuilt, it was called Silent Night Chapel after the Christmas carol.

But it was after this first performance on Christmas Eve, 1818, that the fame of Joseph Moore's Christmas carol began to spread. And it spread all the way across the Atlantic to America, where over 40 years later, it was translated into English in 1859 by an American pastor in New York called John Freeman Young.

But instead of translating all of six of Joseph Moore's original verses, he only translated three of them. And they're the three we have today.

And he translated it, and he used the same tune, and we have these three familiar and famous verses, where it begins, 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.

[8 : 40] Now, as you said, this opening verse, it draws our attention to the mother, the mother of Jesus. Because Mary was, as Isaiah prophesied she would be, she would be a virgin mother.

We're told that in verse 22 of Matthew 1. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet Isaiah. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which means God with us.

Now, as you know, when it comes to the subject matter of the Virgin Mary, we often try and tread very carefully and very cautiously.

because, well, we don't want to be accused of following in the footsteps of the Roman Catholic Church. We don't want to venerate the Virgin Mary. And you know, the interesting thing about all this is that the theology of the Roman Catholic Church is spot on when it comes to Christology, when it comes to the person of Jesus Christ.

They're spot on. As a Reformed Presbyterian denomination, we agree 100% with the Roman Catholic Church on Christology, on the person of Jesus Christ.

[9 : 58] But that's about it. Because we diverge and they distort the teaching of Scripture when it comes to what we call soteriology, which is the work of Jesus Christ.

So there's the person, who he is, there's the work, which is what he does and what he has done for us. And one of the reasons we diverge from the Roman Catholic Church is because they have this distorted view of the Virgin Mary.

In Roman Catholic theology, the Virgin Mary is, you could say, venerated to an unbiblical position equal to that of Jesus Christ.

Now this Roman Catholic teaching, it stems from the descriptions and the definitions of Mary that are used throughout the Bible where Mary is described as the favored one. She's also described as blessed among women.

She's also described as the blessed virgin. And the thing is, no one will ever deny, and there's no doubt that Mary was the favored one. She was the blessed one. She was special because she bore the Savior of the world in her womb and gave birth to him in the inn, in the stable.

[11 : 09] But you know, the veneration of the Virgin Mary it began when the early church described and began to define Mary as, boys and girls, the theotokos, which is the God-bearer.

Theo, God, tokos, carrier. So, the God-carrier. And this, when they venerated Mary, it led to Maryology, which is the study of Mary, which led on to Maryolatry, which is the worship of Mary. But what's clear when you look at the Bible is that Maryology and Maryolatry, it's not based upon the Bible. It's all based upon the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and also the teaching of the Pope.

And as you know, when you move away from the inspired and inerrant and infallible Word of God, you get into all sorts of muddy waters. Because the Roman Catholic theology, it has venerated the Virgin Mary to such a degree that it has, you could say, expanded and exaggerated the biblical teaching of Mary.

Because Maryology and Maryolatry has extended to these other erroneous doctrines. The erroneous doctrines of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, which claims that Mary, the mother of Jesus, she was sinless.

[12 : 35] She was preserved and protected from original sin. Not when she conceived, not when she conceived Jesus by the Holy Ghost, but when she herself was conceived in her mother's womb.

So they believe in the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Another erroneous doctrine is the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary, that when Mary died, she wasn't buried.

She, or she didn't die, in fact. She didn't die and she wasn't buried at all. She actually was assumed to heaven like Enoch and Elijah. She went straight into glory.

But the most dangerous doctrine is that Mary is said to participate in our redemption with the Lord Jesus Christ. So, we've heard before Jesus plus, so it's Jesus plus Mary.

where they teach that Mary is known as the redemptrix. She's the female redeemer. Or the mediatrix, the female mediator.

[13 : 38] And this is why so many people pray to Mary. I remember as an apprentice, we were rewiring the Roman Catholic Church in Stornoway. And one of the lights I had to wire was the light that would shine down on Mary's head.

And I always wondered why? Why the fascination with Mary? Why put her in such a prominent position? But it's all because a sinner, they're taught in the Roman Catholic Church.

A sinner is granted grace by Jesus. But it only flows to them through Mary. And you know, I want to be clear on this. I think it's important for us to touch on it.

We're not here to condemn or to criticize, but we want to be clear. We want to be clear in what the Bible teaches. And Roman Catholic theology has wrongly venerated the Virgin Mary to an unbiblical position.

They have put Mary on the same level as Jesus. And as we all know, there's no one on the same level as Jesus. He is King of Kings. He's Lord of Lords.

[14 : 46] And you know, every time I think about it, I'm always reminded of just how misguided and misled they really are. And even though they present and portray themselves as good and glorious and they have all the glitter and all the glamour and all the gold, all it is is this facade of falsehood.

And it's leading millions and millions of people to a lost eternity. And that's why we need to be so sure in our theology.

That's why it's so important to understand what we believe. And you know, it was no wonder the reformers and the Puritans after them. It's no wonder they even went as far as to regard the Pope as the Antichrist.

They call him the man of sin. It's in our confession. And they said that because anything that moves away from the firm foundation of the Bible, that is on sinking ground.

It's sure to lead along the broad road to destruction. And so it ought to remind us about the importance of having a firm foundation upon Scripture and Scripture alone.

[15:54] That's why the reformers emphasized sola scriptura, Scripture alone. We base all our teaching, all our theology upon Scripture and Scripture alone.

And that's why this Christmas carol, it isn't just about the mother. We see there in verse 2, it's also about the menja. So we see that secondly. So the mother, verse 1, and then the menja, verse 2.

The menja, Joseph Moore's verse, it reads, Silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight, glory stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing hallelujah.

Christ the Savior is born. Christ the Savior is born. Now when it comes to the birth of Jesus, we're familiar with the concept of the menja.

Probably more because of another well-known Christmas carol that's on the back of your sheet. It's the Christmas carol Away in a Manger. Away in a Manger. Which is a Christmas carol that has long been associated and attributed to the German reformer Martin Luther.

[17:04] We're all familiar with Martin Luther and his love of teaching sola scriptura and Christ alone and all these great sola teachings. But Martin Luther, he wrote this Christmas carol and many people in Germany, they refer to it as Luther's cradle song or Luther's cradle hymn where parents would sing it to their children to help them fall asleep.

And we're familiar with the concept of the manger because of the lyrics, Luther's lyrics of Away in a Manger where it says there, Away in a Manger, no crib for a bed. The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head.

The stars in the bright sky look down where he lay. The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay. The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying he makes.

I love thee, Lord Jesus. Look down from the sky and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh. Be near me, Lord Jesus. I ask thee to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray.

Bless all the dear children in thy tender care and take us to heaven to live with thee there. Now, although I would question Luther's claim that Jesus didn't cry when he was born, Luther's cradle song is a beautiful prayer.

[18:27] A beautiful prayer for the next generation. It's a beautiful prayer for our grandchildren and our children. You know, I don't know about you, but when I read these words the other day in preparing for this evening, when I read those words, it brought me immediately back to my childhood and having, just as the children will probably do tomorrow evening, standing in front of all the parents and singing it at a Christmas concert.

But especially the words there in the middle of verse 2 where it says, I love thee, Lord Jesus. Look down from the sky and stay by my cradle till morning is nigh.

Be near me, Lord Jesus. I ask thee to stay close by me forever and love me, I pray. Bless all the dear children in thy tender care and take us to heaven to live with thee there.

It's a beautiful prayer for the next generation. But as I mentioned, we're familiar with the concept of the manger, largely because of Luther's lyrics, away in a manger.

And I say that because the manger is only ever mentioned, actually, in Luke's gospel. So the manger in the birth narrative is only ever mentioned in Luke's gospel, in Luke chapter 2, which we read earlier.

[19:45] And when we were looking at that chapter, we saw there, in Luke 2, verse 7, we read there about the swaddling of the Savior. The swaddling of the Savior.

It says that Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. Then we went down to verse 12 and we read about the sign from the singing angels.

This will be a sign for you. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And then we went further down the narrative to verse 16 and we read about the sight of the

shepherds.

They went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. Lying in a manger, lying in a manger, lying in a manger. Three times in the birth narrative of Luke's gospel, he mentions the manger.

He mentions it in the swaddling of the Savior, the sign of the singing angels, and the sight of the shepherds. And on three occasions, Luke reminds us that when Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem, he was laid in a manger.

[20 : 55] Now you have to question, well, why does Luke say it? You know, if the Bible mentions something once, it's important. If it mentions it twice, we need to take note. But if it mentions it three times, we need to sit up and listen.

And it's important to understand that the person who wrote this gospel was a doctor. Do you know Luke was a doctor?

He was a physician. He was a general practitioner. He was a GP. He was known and loved as Dr. Luke. So the author of Luke's gospel was Dr. Luke.

I don't suppose that many of us like it when we have to go to the doctor. But in coming to this doctor, Dr. Luke, he presents to us in his gospel a greater physician.

He highlights before us the great physician, Jesus Christ. That's what his whole gospel is about. He tells us about the great physician. Even Jesus said himself, those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.

[21 : 56] I've not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. But you know, what amazes me, or what amazes Dr. Luke in writing his gospel, what you could say even blows his mind, is that this great physician of souls was born into this world and laid in a manger.

And you know, the reason Dr. Luke mentions the manger three times in the birth narrative is that he wants us to sit up and take note of what took place.

He's telling us something important that happened. He said that the manger is, we read there that the manger was mentioned in the swaddling of the Savior, the singing of the angels, and the sight of the shepherds.

On three occasions he mentions that when Jesus is born in Bethlehem, he's laid in a manger. And Luke, Dr. Luke, writes and records this as a doctor.

And he does so in order to emphasize and to explain the shock factor of the whole event. Luke is saying to us, he's bringing us into the stable in Bethlehem, and he's saying to us, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the God of glory, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the sovereign, superior, supreme ruler of all creation, who spoke this world into being, who upholds this world by the word of his power.

[23 : 32] He was born into this world as a defenseless and dependent baby, and he's laid in a manger. And Luke is saying, do you get this?

He was laid in a manger. And of course, when Luke mentions the manger three times, he's not talking about a top-of-the-range crib from mamas and papas with all the clean and cozy bedsheets. No, Luke is literally saying to us, he was laid in a feeding trough. He was laid in a feeding trough. Boys and girls, that's what a manger is.

It's a feeding trough. And you know, you read the gospel and as if Dr. Luke, who was a professional doctor, always had his hands clean as a doctor, and Dr. Luke is saying to us, are you getting this? Are you hearing this? Do you understand what's really happening here? Are you comprehending the magnitude and the massiveness of this?

[24 : 34] Are you seeing that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, the God of glory, the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the sovereign, superior, supreme ruler of all creation, he was born into our world.

And he was born as a defenseless and dependent baby and laid in a feeding trough. And you know, as a doctor, I'm sure Dr. Luke was involved in the maternity ward in Bethlehem and other places throughout his life.

I'm sure he was used to deliver children into the world, but he knew that this baby was different. This child was different.

And where did they lay him? In a manger. In a manger. In a manger. In a manger. They laid him in a feeding trough. I know that some of you own cattle.

Some of you have sheep. And my father, or as the boys call him, they call him Schenner Melbost. Schenner Melbost has a number of cows. They're kept in the barn over the winter from now until probably February.

[25 : 52] But you know, if there's one place you don't bring a newborn baby, it's to a barn. I don't suppose we would bring some of our babies in this congregation and take them to the barn and place them in a feeding trough.

And yet, Dr. Luke is telling us, this is what your Savior did for you. And this is the shock factor of the whole thing.

This is what your Savior did for you. He humbled Himself from His majesty and glory down, down, down to the manger in Bethlehem.

He humbled Himself from the majesty of glory to the manger in Bethlehem. And you know, it's as He considered not only the context of the manger, but also the content of the manger.

It's there that Joseph Moore, he writes these words, silent night, holy night, shepherds quake at the sight, glory stream from heaven afar, heavenly hosts sing hallelujah.

[27 : 04] Why? They're all looking into the manger and they're all saying, Christ the Savior is born. Christ the Savior is born.

My friend, He humbled Himself from the majesty in glory down to the manger in Bethlehem. So there are three verses in this Christmas carol.

There are three headings. The mother, the manger, and lastly and briefly, the message. The message. Look at verse three of the carol.

It says, Silent night, holy night, Son of God, loves pure light. Radiant beams from Thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace. Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth.

Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth. Joseph Moore's Christmas carol has often been remembered for its impact and influence during the First World War.

[28 : 04] I'm sure you've heard the story that the war had been raging along the Western Front since October 1914. But in the week leading up to Christmas that year in 1914, both sides agreed what was an unofficial truce.

An unofficial truce and ceasefire where the British and the German soldiers, they put down their weapons and then they rose out of their trenches and they went into no man's land to meet and to greet one another.

And it was there that you read about the history of it. It's there that both sides exchanged gifts of food and they also sang together. And they sang this carol.

You know, what better carol to sing than this Christmas carol? A carol that was originally written in German but had been translated into English. And there's the two sides, the Germans and the English and they're singing the same carol together.

But whether it was the Germans who sang, they sang their Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht or the British sang Silent Night, Holy Night, what better song to sing than this song?

[29 : 24] And even though it was, they were singing in German, they were singing in English, they were singing the same tune, the same tune that Franz Gruber had originally written.

And they were singing that Christmas, 1914, singing in no man's land in the midst of the horror and heartache of war.

What better song to sing, what better saviour to sing about apart from this saviour? And you know, undoubtedly the wars of the past and the wars of the present, they only highlight to us the ruin, the ruin that sin has brought.

But the gospel according to this Christmas carol that presents to us and points us to the fact that the remedy to our ruin, the remedy to our ruin can only be found in the person of Jesus Christ.

The remedy to our ruin can only be found in the person of Jesus Christ. That's why we have verse 3. That's the message to us, silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light, radiant beams from thy holy face with the dawn of redeeming grace.

[30 : 38] Jesus, Lord at thy birth, Jesus, Lord at thy birth. And you know, it reminds us, doesn't it, that Jesus is the reason for the season of Christmas.

Because as this Christmas carol asserts and affirms to us, the birth of Jesus Christ spelled, as it says there in the third verse, it spelled the dawn of redeeming grace.

The birth of Jesus Christ spelled the dawn of redeeming grace, where there was going to be a new beginning with new hope, a new light, and a new opportunity to hear the gospel that would go to the

far corners of the world.

It was all through the mother of Jesus and the manger of Jesus that we were given the message of Jesus. The message that Jesus simply came to seek and to save that which was lost.

And you know, we shouldn't lose sight of that. He came to secure our redemption. He came to bring reconciliation. He came to assure our restoration.

[31 : 47] My friend, this is the gospel according to Christmas carols. And it says there in verse 2, Silent night, holy night. Shepherds quake at the sight.

Glories stream from heaven afar. Heavenly hosts sing, Alleluia. Christ the Savior is born. Christ the Savior is born.

Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to Thee that we are able to echo the words of the hymn writer and say that Christ the Savior is born, that He was born, that He lived the life we could not live.

He died the death we deserve to die. He rose triumphant over the grave. He ascended to Thy right hand. And tonight, He makes intercession for us to await that glorious and final day where He will come to judge the quick and the dead.

O Lord, help us, we pray, to give Him all the praise and the honour and the glory that He deserves, that He would be elevated and uplifted, that He would be the one who is honoured in all things, that Christ would have the preeminence, that Thou, our great God, would have all the glory, and that we as Thy people that we would know blessing.

[33 : 16] All bless Thy truth to us, we ask, that we, each and every one of us, that we would know Jesus. We would know Him in His passion. We would know Him in His work. We would know Him, Lord, personally, and come to confess, as the psalmist said, that He took me from a fearful pit and from the miry clay, and on a rock He set my feet, establishing my way.

He put a new song in my mouth, our God to magnify. Many shall see it and shall fear and on the Lord rely. O Lord, bless us, then we pray.

Go before us, take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Now, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 40.

Psalm 40, again in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 40, we're singing from verse 5 down to the verse 8. It's page 259 of the Blue Psalm book. Psalm 40, page 259. But before we sing, you got all the answers for me.

[34 : 37] Oh, it's a few nods tonight, okay. Question one, in what language was Silent Night first written? German, well done. Good job. I've got coins here.

I've still got coins left over, so maybe I'll give you them. There's three coins. Kate, you can have that one. What does Theotokos mean? Right, that's your one, David.

Okay, what was a manger? Or the manger? What do you call that? A what? A manger? What else? What do you call it? A trough? A trough? A feeding trough? Right, that's yours, Schwinley. Okay, well done. So in what language is Silent Night first written? German? What does Theotokos mean? God bearer. What was a manger? It was a feeding trough. Well done. Very good at listening. Okay, Psalm 40, verse 5.

[35 : 34] As I mentioned earlier on, the confession of the Christian, it's verses 1 to 5, and then there's the confession of the Christ in verses 6 to 8. So when we're singing verses 6 to 8, it's Jesus that's speaking.

And we should always see that. It's a messianic psalm. It reminds us about the incarnation. And when it says, in verse 7 of Psalm 40, then to the Lord, these were my words.

I come, behold, and see, within the volume of the book it written is of me. That's Jesus speaking, where he is written throughout the pages of Scripture.

He's on every page. So Psalm 40, at verse 5, O Lord my God, full many are, the wonders thou hast done, thy gracious thoughts to us were far, above all thoughts are gone.

Down to the verse marked 8. We'll stand to sing, if you're able, to God's praise. O Lord my God, full many are, the wonders thou hast done, thy gracious thoughts to us were far, above all thoughts are gone.

[37 : 01] In order, none God reckon them, to thee if them declare, and speak of them, I would they more, than can be numbered are.

New sacrifice, nor offering, is thou what all desire.

Mine is the portion offering, and burn, and burn, didst not require.

Then to the Lord, these were my words, I come, behold, and see, within the volume of the book, it written is of me.

To do thy will, I take delight, O thou my God, thou art, yea, that most holy law of thine, I have with it, my heart.

[39 : 04] The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.