



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

O Holy Night

HEAVEN & NATURE SING

Tim Badal | December 24, 2022

As a church, we've been in a series these past few Sundays called "Heaven & Nature Sing." We've been looking at the stories behind the songs of Christmas. Sometimes when we sing songs, we really don't know the meaning behind them nor the context in which the songs

were written. That's probably the most true when we sing Christmas carols. We've looked at some of the most famous songs: "Joy to the World" and "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." Tomorrow we'll hear the story behind "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

Tonight we'll be focusing on a song that is about Christmas Eve. In fact, there are a lot of songs written about this very night, such as "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing," "Angels We Have Heard on High," "Away in a Manger," and "Silent Night."

This evening we'll be looking at "O Holy Night." There's a reason why I think Christmas Eve songs are so important to our celebration and why they're so famous. We want to sing about all that transpired that first Christmas Eve because of the anticipation of what was coming. Christmas Eve is a time when we look ahead to what is about to take place. Several movies get this down, recognizing the significance of Christmas Eve. It all started with a novel that has been put to probably dozens of movies now, *A Christmas Carol*. On Christmas Eve, Scrooge experiences a rebirth after he's visited by various spirits, then he begins to realize that life is far more than money, riches, and selfishness.

Then I think of another movie in which two men come back from World War II, showmen who used Christmas Eve night to put on a show to help save their old general from financial collapse. The questions in "A White Christmas" are, "Will the people show up to this incredible night? Will it in fact snow and bring the needed help?"

I also think of some more modern-day movies. I think of the anticipation the Kranks had of their only daughter coming home for Christmas and bringing her new fiancé. Still others, a young boy anticipating the Wet Bandits that are coming to destroy his house, and Kevin McAllister being ready and armed to take them on. Another one I think of on Christmas Eve night is waiting for your Christmas bonus to arrive, only to find out you've been given a subscription to the "Jelly of the Month" club. It's the gift that keeps on giving all year round, Clark.

Now, I've got to be honest with you. If there was a movie that depicts anticipating something great, surely it would have been the anticipation of the great fight between Rocky Balboa and Ivan Drago on Christmas Day. Amen? Christmas Eve is all about anticipation. Right now, some of you are wondering how long this guy is going to talk. You're anticipating food, festivities, and fun waiting for you at home. No doubt you're anticipating what you'll find under the tree. Christmas Eve is a night of anticipation.

When a priest was asked to write a poem on a Christmas Eve night that would be read at Christmas Mass, that priest, whose name was Placide Cappeau, wrote the lyrics to our song back in 1843. In fact, it was written in the final moments before the service began. Historians tell us that as the opening song was finished, he was still writing the last stanza. In 1855, this song was made famous in America because a pastor by the name of John Sullivan Dwight translated the words from French to English. His version—"O Holy Night"—is the song we sing today.

We hear the word "holy" and think religious, even ultra-spiritual. But really, all the word means is that something is set apart. When we say God is a holy God, it means He's different from everything else in our lives. He is set apart. Christmas Eve is a night that's different from any other night. What sets this night apart?



Hollywood gives us a lot of reasons. You might even have your own reasons. But the reason the Bible says this is a holy night is put this way by the songwriter in the opening words of the song: "O holy night! The stars are brightly shining. It is the night of the dear Savior's birth." This night is different from the other 364 nights of the year because it was the night Jesus made His first appearance here on earth. The prophets had been speaking of this moment hundreds of years in advance. In fact, in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, God Himself said there was One Who would come—and that night in Bethlehem was His arrival. Isaiah put it this way in Isaiah 7:14: *"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel,"* which means "God with us."

Here we have, on this special night, Jesus making His arrival as one of us. But that isn't the only reason this night is set apart as holy.

The songwriter goes on to tell us the reason Jesus had to come: "Long lay the world in sin and error...." In one sentence, this writer has given us the entire message of the Old Testament. He is describing the world from Genesis to Malachi. You see, since the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve turned their backs on God, we all like sheep have likewise gone astray, each going our own way (Isaiah 53:6). We were in sin and error. We were enemies of God. Even though God was benevolent, kind and good, we kept turning our backs to Him.

What does God do? He allows us to live in that state for a little while. Like a good parent allowing a child to experience some of the consequences of their choices, God allows humanity to experience the consequence of sin. The song says the world was "in sin and error pining." We sing that, but we often don't know what it means. Pining literally means to be in a place of despair and depression. It means to be so distraught that you don't want to eat, drink, or even to live life. This is the Old Testament in one phrase: "In sin and error pining." We're hopeless, helpless, and lost. We're tired of living life.

That's exactly where some of you find yourself this evening: beat up and broken down. Life isn't going the way you want it to, so you're wondering what's going on. It's the reality that you're living in a world of sin and error, and not just your own. All of us have brought this on ourselves. As a result, we have no hope. We had no hope until, as the song says, "He appeared." When Jesus appeared, "the soul felt its worth." Those words again roll right off our tongues, but we don't really think about what they mean. The songwriter is essentially saying, "Before Jesus appeared, we who were distraught, who were desperate, who found ourselves in anguish, had begun to think we were unloved by God. We thought we were worthless in God's sight." But then when Jesus appeared on Christmas night, we began to realize how truly worthy we are.

Now, before you start welling up with pride, you need to understand that our worth is found solely in God's love for us. The Apostle John wrote, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son"* (John 3:16). So Christmas Eve night, the night our Savior made His appearance, should tell all of us that God saw us worthy to be saved, worthy to be redeemed.

Maybe you don't feel very worthy. Maybe you don't feel very loved this Christmas Eve night. Maybe you have been alienated by people and left out of celebrations. Maybe relationships have soured and you feel alone. I want you to know tonight that Christmas reminds us that each of us is so important and loved that God sent His only Son to redeem us from our sins. It is there that we find our true worth, value, and identity. What happens when we experience this? The songwriter continues: "A thrill of hope" comes to this weary world that's pining away in error and sin. It rejoices, because "yonder breaks a new and glorious morn." Early Christmas morning, a glorious day is birthed. This is our hope. The hope of Christmas is that Jesus came to a helpless and hopeless world to give it a new identity and opportunity to live in fellowship with God. This leads us to only one response. The song says we are to "fall on [our] knees" and "hear the angel voices." We are to realize that this is a "night divine," the "night when Christ was born."

With the time we have left, let me give you three ways you ought to be worshiping Christ this Christmas.

1. We need to sing. We need to hear the angels singing and we need to join them. When the angels announced in Luke 2:14 (NIV), *"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests,"* it gives us reason to sing. That's why we've done so much singing tonight. We are to rejoice in song, ascribing to God the great glory due Him because He sent Jesus to be our Lord and Savior.
2. We're supposed to announce this Christmas message to any and all who will listen. The shepherds did that in Luke 2. We see that they left the place where they had heard the angels singing, telling everyone who would listen what they had heard. So as you fill your hearts with singing the praises of the One Who came, share that with others. Even tonight and tomorrow, as you're with family and friends, tell them even in small ways that this celebration is not about what's under

the tree. It's not about Santa and all the great things we've made Christmas to be, even though these can bring joy and fun. But more than this, we need to share how Jesus came to bring hope to the world.

3. There's something else the songwriter keys in on that I believe is important for us to think about these days. He says it's not just good enough for us to sing about what God has done and will do—we need to show it. In the final stanza he says, "Truly He taught us to love one another. His law is love and His gospel is peace." Then he adds, "Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother, and in His name all oppression shall cease." Those were revolutionary words.

"O Holy Night" was introduced in America in 1855, about five years before the Civil War. In those days, half of our country allowed slavery. Let's remember the great atrocity that it was. We treated people who may have looked different from us, who had a different color of skin, as less than animals. The writer was reminding people that the gospel of Jesus Christ was given to everyone. No matter who we are, no matter what color our skin, no matter where we are in the socio-economic world, no matter on which side of the track our house is found, or what we've done or what we've accomplished, none of that matters. There are only two classes of beings: God and humans. Christmas reminds us that to sing about and speak about the love of Christ found at Christmas isn't enough. Truly, we are called to love one another.

So my prayer for you this Christmas—and for the new year—is that you would love each other. That includes family and friends, yes, but also enemies and those who have hurt you or wronged you, forgiving them as Christ has forgiven you. May we look out for the stranger and help them in their time of need.

I heard earlier today about a family in my town of Hinckley that had no heat. The husband was sick and they had no way to heat their house. In a matter of seconds, the neighbors had a hundred space heaters ready for them, plus three heating and air conditioning guys were on their way. That is loving one another.

So in this Christmas celebration, the way we love and make this night divine is by singing of God's praises, speaking His gospel, and showing His love to a world that needs it. It is there, my friends, that we will praise—as the hymnwriter says—His holy name. Let's make this night what it is, "O night divine, the night of the dear Savior's birth."