

“Silent Night - Advent 2021”

December 5, 2021

INTRO

V1

*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*

V3

*Silent night, holy night!
Son of God love's pure light.
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth*

In this series we're looking at some popular Christmas carols and pointing out how it connects to Scripture and how Jesus came to save us

This week we're looking at Silent Night?

its a song about the night God brought Gave us hope in the form of Jesus bein born out with the animals. Its about the promised King being born in the most unlikely of scenarios.

SEAN STORY

A few years ago, I was having a conversation with a black brother in the faith. I'll call him "Sean", . Sean and I were talking about many of the racial problems in the church between black Christians and white Christians. In that conversation, I told Sean that I stopped following him on social media because everything he was posting about race seemed so hopeless. It was all about how bad things were, and there was nothing hopeful or encouraging, and it just wasn't good for me to see that all the time.

He shared with me why he was posting like that and that he was feeling **hopeless** about the situation. He felt like many white Christians weren't hearing him on a lot of the issues that he was having with a lot of the ways he was seeing white Christians relate to black Christians.

I then told Sean about some of the conversations I'd been having with black pastors and white pastors and places I'd been able to speak with honesty and love about many of those issues that Sean was talking about. I told Sean about positive things that came as a result of many of those conversations, and he told me that those things were very encouraging to him and that he just hadn't heard a lot of stories like that.

And then he said something to me that I think is very profound. He said, you know what Ant, I should have known that. I should have known that in some of the darkest issues God was at work doing something. I should have known that He was doing something in this area that I've been hopeless in.

Church family, today, my hope is that as we look into the Christmas story in Luke, chapter 2, God would fully persuade and convince you that He does some of His greatest redemptive work in places that we would often be least likely to look for Him to be at work... included in some of the darkest of places. That you would be so convinced of this that you would begin to see the areas of hopelessness in your life as prime opportunity for God to do amazing and glorious things. That you would look intently for Him to be doing something in the darkest of places and situations.

The song, Silent Night, is written to draw our attention to the night that Jesus was born... It tells the story of a night where normal things were happening throughout Bethlehem, while God was bringing about the birth that would bring hope to us all.

VERSE 1

*Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon Virgin,
Mother and Child.*

VERSE 3

*Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace*

In an effort to inform our singing with rich beautiful truth from God's Word, today we'll look at what the bible has to say about that night in Luke 2:1-7.

Luke 2:1-7 Breakdown

1 In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And all went to be registered, each to his own town.

Because there was a registration/census at that time everyone had to go to their hometown to be registered. The **Roman Empire was notorious for enforcing these oppressive taxes on the different peoples that they'd conquered** and overtaken so they could fund their huge army. And it's believed that one of the primary reasons for the census/registration was so they could know who all is there so they could continue to tax everyone.

4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. 6 And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

So they had to travel from where Joseph was living, Nazareth to Bethlehem where he was originally from. Mary goes into labor while they're in Bethlehem. Verse 7 says there was no room for them in the inn, so he was born outside with the animals. And after she had given birth to Him and likely after she and Joseph had held Him, there was no bed to put him in, so they wrapped Him in cloths to swaddle Him and Mary put him in a manger.

A manger is a feeding trough for animals... often for horses and cattle.

WHERE YOU WOULDN'T EXPECT HIM

The people in Bethlehem were doing their normal thing during the time of the census. The inn was likely full because there would have been **a lot of people, like Joseph, who was from Bethlehem but had moved away but needed to come back for the census**. They were likely seeing old friends and people they grew up with.

The people of Bethlehem were likely concerned with the logistics of the census/registration and making sure they knew exactly what to do. And I'm not sure how many of us have traveled with small children, but I imagine many of them were doing just that so for the people in Bethlehem, this was likely a very busy time for them with many plans and tasks on their minds.

And right in their midst... Out with the animals, God was at work in and through Mary, giving birth to the salvation of the world.

SON OF DAVID

I'm not sure if you caught it or not, but Luke has already given you a clue that this was indeed the promised Savior in verse 4, **where he referred to Bethlehem as the "City of David"** and He made sure to make the point that Joseph was of the "house" and lineage of David. Now, why is that important?

Well, centuries before that, David was a King that brought great protection and prosperity to God's people. He lead God's people to worship Him and follow Him in many ways when previously they weren't following God... instead, they were in this vicious cycle of idolatry.

And God made an incredible promise to King David. At that time, there was no temple. They had a tent/tabernacle where God would manifest His presence to them. God referred to it as His dwelling place on the earth. But David wanted to build a temple made of brick and stone for God. He didn't like the idea of God's dwelling place being in a tent while he lived in a house, so he was setting out to build God a house, and God spoke to David to tell David that:

- A. I don't want you to build me a house
- B. I'm going to build you a house

1 Chronicles 17:10b-13

10...Moreover, I declare to you that the Lord will build you a house. 11 When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. 12 He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. 13 I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

Just so you understand the language being used, the term “house” in the bible can refer to a physical house or your household/family. So God is using wordplay here to make the point that someone will come through David’s lineage, who will also be the Son of God whose throne will be established forever. He’s essentially saying that one of David’s descendants will always be on the throne.

So when Luke says that Joseph was of the house of David, he’s pointing out to us that **the King that is going to reign forever is being born out with the animals.**

He’s saying that:

- the most anticipated birth in the history of their people went unnoticed.
- God is at work establishing His eternal Kingdom that is going to set His people free and make all things right, and virtually no one noticed it!

He’s revealing to us today that:

- The King of Kings and the Lord of Lords doesn’t always come and move in ways and spaces that you’d expect Him to come and move
- God came in a way we’d least expect... in a way that if you were looking only at things that seem grand in scale you would be missing the grandest and amazing thing(s) that God is doing
- Of all of the great signs and wonders that God had done among His people, He was doing His greatest one yet in a small town/village that many people probably didn’t think much of

And this isn’t the only time we see God doing His work in areas where you might not expect Him to.

RUTH

When Sean told me that he should have known that God was at work in a place where he wouldn’t expect, the first story that came to my mind was the story of Ruth. In the big picture narrative of the bible, Ruth is a story of God working out His plan for salvation in a place where most wouldn’t expect Him to be moving.

... and to see it, you have to pay attention to how the book starts and how the book ends.

Ruth 1:1

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land,

A very important part of the story is the setting. **This happened while the judges were ruling in the land of Israel.** If you’re familiar with that time period in biblical history, you know that the time of the judges was a time when God’s people were not following Him for the most part. They would run to worshipping false gods, and then a nation would come and oppress them, and then they’d cry out to God to save them, and then He’d save them, and then they’d worship Him for a little while, and then back to the same idol worship as before, and they just stayed in that cycle. **It’s a time that just seemed hopeless.** God had called them to be a people that worship Him and Him alone, and show the world how great He is, and yet they only turn to Him when their circumstances are bad, and then once things have been good for a little while, they turn away from Him again.

So this story is set in that context. Keep reading...

and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons.

Elimelech goes with his wife Naomi and two sons from Bethlehem to a different country, Moab, which is just outside of Israel's borders because there is a famine in their land. There, in Moab, their sons get married to Moabite women, Ruth being one of them. Elimelech dies and their sons die, leaving Ruth and Naomi as widows with no sons to care for them.

Ultimately Ruth goes back with her mother-in-law, Naomi, to Bethlehem, and Ruth gets married again and has a son. And that son was a part of God's plan to bring blessing to many more people, and we see that when we look at the last verses in the book of Ruth.

Ruth 4:17

17 And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, (talking about Ruth's son) saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Why do I share this story? Because during the time of the judges when the spiritual condition of God's people looked hopeless. When they rarely worshipped or followed God, and even when they did, it seems as if they just did it to get out of trouble, because once they were safe from their enemies, they went back to their idolatry and forsook their God again.

And in the middle of all of that, when things seemed hopeless for God's people, God was at work, on the outskirts, in the margins, outside of where His people would have been looking, God was putting the pieces in place to bring His people the King that would lead them to righteousness and away from this sinful and idolatrous cycle that they were in. He was working to bring them David, and ultimately, He was shaping the lineage that He would use to bring the salvation of all who would trust and believe in Him!

Where are the areas of your life that you don't expect God to be working? Where are the areas where it seems so dark that you've grown hopeless? I'm talking about areas that you don't even pray about because you just don't see God doing anything good in that situation... maybe it's an area you used to pray about, but now you're like, "What's the point?"

STORY: COLBY

I asked my son Colby if he was okay with me telling this story, and he said he was cool with it. Colby tends to deal with a lot of severely negative thoughts about himself. And there were some times, not so much here recently, where it would get really bad where he would talk about hating himself and he would get so angry with himself that he would start hitting himself really hard to try to hurt himself because he felt like he needed to punish himself for all the wrong things he'd done.

And one evening, I'm sitting with him and we're talking about it, and he kept saying over and over stuff like, look at how I've wronged my brother and my mom and the awful things I've done to them, I need to punish myself like this.

And I'm just in tears hearing my 7yo son say these things... and eventually, I read him a scripture that God has used in my life...

Isaiah 1:18

“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.”

Long story short, I asked him if he sees himself as being cleansed in Christ and being white as snow, or if he sees himself as being stained by His sin. He told me that he didn't feel like he was cleansed from His sins, he felt like he was still wearing his sin.

Then I showed Him [this picture](#), and said, this is what God says is true of you, as a follower of Jesus. I heard him exhale a sigh of relief when I showed him that picture... and I think it was the next day at the dinner table, my wife had asked us all to share something we're grateful for, and I went and grabbed my phone and showed him that screenshot, and he just prayed something to the effect of, “God thank you so much for making me white as snow... because that really lifts my spirits.”

Now, Colby knew and understood and could articulate the gospel and how we've been forgiven in Christ if we put our faith in Him. He knew that much before this conversation... but when he was struggling emotionally and mentally more than he ever had before, God helped him to:

- see His goodness in a new light
- Begin to see his own need for the gospel and begin to appreciate the Good News of Jesus like never before

Light always shines brightest in darkness, and I am convinced that I am here today on an assignment from God to remind you that God is often active and working in places that you least expect!

I wonder if:

- God is at work in the heart of one of your coworkers making their heart fertile ground for the message of Jesus while you're focused solely on the tasks at hand instead of asking the Holy Spirit to help you to be sensitive to His activity among your coworkers
- God is calling you to not give up on praying for that family member that you just can't see ever coming to Christ
- You have the type of faith in God that asks, even in the most difficult and painful times of suffering, “God how do you want to grow me in this? God, what do you want to teach me? God, how might I leverage this difficult and painful situation to grow in my knowledge of you?”

KELLI HOSPITAL STORY

I think it was back in July when a friend of mine who has been a member at 2N for 7+ years now, whose name is Kelli was admitted to the hospital and they were trying to get a good diagnosis for her for some of the issues and ailments that she was noticing in her body. They knew something was seriously, seriously wrong, but they didn't know what, which is a very scary place to be because the symptoms were getting

really severe. She was experiencing a lot of weakness and fatigue and difficulty breathing at times. Kelli is about my age and I remember when she came to an event we had and she needed help walking to and from her seat.

Since this time, we found out that she has cancer and several other ailments all at the same time.

So they were running all kinds of tests on her and some of them were very uncomfortable and even painful. So, I went to visit her, and you know I'm planning on going to try to be an encouragement to her because I'm the pastor, that's what I'm supposed to do...

And when I got there everything was the exact opposite of what I expected. Kelli starts sharing with me how she's doing and then she just starts talking about how much God was showing her just how present He was with her and how much he loved her and would never leave her or forsake her and how she was able to have such great time with God b/c she had so much time to read her bible and just talk to God and just put on worship music and she felt a stronger connection with God than she had felt before!

And literally, as she's getting excited about how she's telling the nurses there about her faith and what God is doing in her life, she's literally laboring and having to work to breathe, and I'm watching her working hard to breathe while she's proclaiming to me the goodness of God in the middle of the darkness.

And I'm going in there thinking I'm going to encourage her, but God had been so at work in her life in the middle of the pain and suffering and uncertainty showing her his eternal steadfast love and peace and joy!

And since then, Kelli has come to our worship services at 2N week in and week out, sometimes in a wheelchair... sometimes bringing her oxygen tank with her. And when we sing she's standing up every single week, raising her hands swaying back and forth using the strength that she has to worship and glorify the God that is with her even in the darkest of times.

Over these last few months, there is not a single person on this earth that has encouraged me in my faith more than Kelli has, and I say that to reassure you that God loves to:

- be at work in places you least expect Him to
- Shine His light in dark places
- Give hope to hopeless people that are in situations that seem hopeless

And my prayer for us is, Oh God, give us all the faith we need to look for your work and your power even the most difficult of times and the times and places we least expect you to be moving! Give us the faith to find hope in the fact that you work all things together for our good whether or not our situations change the way that we want them to! Help us to be convinced that you are a God who works even in the darkest of times.

THE CENSUS

And this Christmas story in Luke Chapter 2, wasn't just a story of God bringing in salvation and hope in a place where most wouldn't look. It's also a story of Him bringing salvation and hope in the middle of great sin and pain.

Remember that a part of the reason that Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem was because the census/registration was a part of the way that Rome would oppress the people groups that they had conquered.

So, on this night that we sing about as we sing Silent Night, not only was God bringing healing, and hope, and salvation to the world in a place that most wouldn't expect to look, but as He's coming to save the world from sin and brokenness, He uses the sin and brokenness of this world to do it.

He's bringing righteousness out of unrighteousness.

He's bringing light out of the darkness.

He's using the sin in this world to bring about the birth of the one that is going to rid His world of sin!

THE CROSS

That's what Jesus does at His birth! And that's what He does at His death!

Family, I want to encourage you, if there's an area of your life that you feel hopeless about, to take heart in the fact that God is often at work in those dark places where there might not seem like there's any room for hope!

Isaiah 53:7-8

*7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away;*

God suffered under **sin** to rid this world of sin

God suffered **injustice** to rid this world of injustice

God suffered **oppression** to rid this world of oppression

God suffered under **hate** to rid this world of hate

God suffered **death** to rid this world of death

God consistently is taking the devil's weapons and using them to defeat him.

Hear me on this family, and I want you to remember this and remind every cynical, hopeless, discouraging thought that you have about all of the sin and brokenness in your life and in this world of this truth

God loves to be at work in and through the:

- Darkness
- Sin
- Injustice
- Pain and suffering.

And my hope is that when we see Jesus in a manger in Bethlehem, and when we begin to look intently for God's activity in the places that seem hopeless and the places we least expected to see Him at work, we'll begin to echo what Sean was saying in my conversation with him:

- I should have known that God was going to be at work teaching me to rely on Him and depend on Him in my time of sickness

- I should have known that when my coworker was opening up to me about some of the problems in their life, that God was opening a door for me to share with them the hope I have found in Jesus

- I should have known that in the pain of losing a loved one, in the difficulty of processing my hurt and grief, in the times of financial hardship, and in the fear and uncertainty of that hospital visit, God was up to something and working where I wasn't expecting Him!

So let's look for Him there. Let's let this holy night in Bethlehem speak to us in our hopelessness. Let's let it remind us that no matter how dark and difficult and painful things get, our God loves to work in the places and times we often least expect