
Text: [Luke 2:1-7](#); [Luke 2:15-20](#);

Republic, December 22, 2024

Title: "Background of Christmas Hymns, Pt 4 - O Holy Night"

History of the writer, and music writer

"O Holy Night" had its origins in France in 1847. The writer was a part-time poet, who was not really a very religious man. He was asked by the priest of a church the poet was going to, to write a poem for Christmas mass. That man's name was Placide (*Pla-ceed*) Cappeau (*Cap-poe*).

After Placide wrote the poem, he was so happy with it that he asked another man, Adolphe (*Ad-dolf*) Adam, to put his poem to music. The title was not specifically called "O Holy Night." The English translation of the title actually meant "Christmas Carol." What is also interesting is Adolphe Adam was a Jew. So, he was helping to create the music about the birth of Jesus.

Let's make a point here: God can, and does, use anyone to do His will. The song was written by a non-religious man, whom was very likely not even a christian when he wrote it, who a short time later fell away from the church, & became a socialist. Then, a Jewish music writer who doesn't even believe in Jesus, puts the song to music. These were the two reasons the Catholic church a short time later banned the song.

We tend to be the judgemental ones. The song was a great song, and wactually very biblical, but it was banned because of the lives of the two men. God will use whomever He wants to use, to do whatever He wants done.

Back to the hymn:

Approximately 8 years later since it was first a poem, an American by the name of John Sullivan Dwight translated the song to english, and also revised some of the lyrics of the song. He called it "O Holy Night." In our hymnal John Sullivan Dwight is recognized as the writer of the song, and Adolphe (*Ad-dolf*) Adam is recognized as the person who created the music.

Since then, many, many, well known people in America have sung and recorded this song all the way up until today. My favorite singers of the song are ones who understand that this song builds and builds in volume, and in emphasis.

The story is really about this passage of scripture:

Luke 2:1-7 (NKJV)

- ¹ And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.
- ² This census first took place while Quirinius (*Kwer-rin-knee-us*) was governing Syria.
- ³ So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. (*mainly the city of birth*)
- ⁴ Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of

David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David,
(*It was about a 3 day journey*)

- ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed (*buh-trothed*) wife, who was with child.
⁶ So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered.
⁷ And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Verses 8-14 are verses we have already thoroughly talked about in Parts 2 & 3 of this series. They are about the angel appearances to the shepherds.

Meanwhile, the shepherds who were in the fields and had just heard from the angels:
Luke 2:15-20 (NKJV)

- ¹⁵ So it was, when the angels had gone away from them into heaven, that the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us."
¹⁶ And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.
¹⁷ Now when they had seen *Him*, **they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child.** (*They told them what the angel said & what happened with the heavenly host*)
¹⁸ **And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds.** (*the way its "worded" sounds as if others were there besides Joseph and Mary*)
¹⁹ But **Mary kept all these things and pondered *them* in her heart.**
²⁰ Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God **for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.**

So, again, it sounds as if more than Joseph and Mary heard the shepherds sharing what happened to them. Perhaps there were people from the Inn that came outside and were talking to Mary and Joseph.

When you look closely at verse 20, the shepherds left Joseph and Mary glorifying and praising God *for what?* "**For all the things that they had heard and seen (*the Christ child*) as it was told them.**" So, this gives us the impression that there was sharing going back and forth, probably Joseph and Mary telling the shepherds all they had experienced as well.

"O Holy Night"

Words by John S. Dwight 1813-1893 Music by Adophe C. Adam 1803-1856

Verse 1

O holy night! the stars are brightly shining; It is the night of the dear Savior's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth
A thrill of hope - the weary world rejoices For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!
Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices! O night divine! O night when Christ was born!
O night divine! O night, O night divine!

"the stars are brightly shining" - Scripture does not specifically say this. Other Christmas hymns say this as well. It is a guess by the writer of what the sky looked like. When you can see lots of stars in the sky, it does seem to make it more beautiful. *And, why not have a beautiful sky on the night the Savior is born?* This is the only part of the song that we cannot 100% prove by scripture. *Do you believe that's probably what happened?*

"It is the night of the dear Savior's birth" - self explanatory

"Long lay the world in sin and error pining" - the world had been in sin & living in error for a long time. The world had been (pining--->) yearning, or longing, for someone, or something to help.

"Til He appeared and the soul felt its worth" - With Jesus' birth the world felt how much God loved them. People were able to see, or feel, their worth to God. It also shows that God truly wants a relationship with us.

"A thrill of hope - the weary world rejoices" - The world is going from a feeling of weariness to finally feeling the thrill accompanied with hope.

"For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn!" - "Yonder breaks" - from a distance a new dawn is appearing. It's the beginning of a new day in this world.

"Fall on your knees! O hear the angel's voices!" - This should be our response to what God has brought to us, the Christ child. *Are these words your favorite part of the song? Do they cause you to tear up?*

"O night divine! O night when Christ was born!" "O night di---vine! O night, O night divine!"

Verse 2

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming Here came the wise men from the Orient land.
The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger, In all our trials born to be our Friend.
He knows our need - to our weakness is no stranger
Behold your King; before Him lowly bend! Behold your King; before Him lowly bend!

"Led by the light of faith serenely beaming" - Basically it is faith guided by God's light in a (serenely--->) peaceful, untroubled, steady path.

"With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand" - We can see ourselves by the cradle of Jesus and it causes our hearts to glow within us.

"So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming Here came the wise men from the Orient land" - (already clear enough, referring to the wise men following the sweet star)

"The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger" - Jesus, being God, yet born in a humble setting, not seeking to be upety, but rather on our level. It is another beautiful part of the Christmas story.

"In all our trials born to be our Friend" - *Again, is this one of your favorite phrases in the song?* He is there to help us in every trial we face, and He does it like a best friend.

"He knows our need" - He knows what is going on in your life. He knows your need before you even ask. So, follow through by talking to Him about what you need.

"to our weakness is no strang-er" - He is not a stranger to all or any of your weaknesses.

"Behold your King: before Him lowly bend" (said twice) - Look upon your King, Jesus Christ, and humbly bow down before Him in reverence and submission. This also shows how we are to live our lives. He is in charge, not us.

Verse 3

Truly He taught us to love one another;	His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains shall He break,	for the slave is our brother
And in His name all opprssiion shall cease.	Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we;
Let all within us praise His holy name.	Christ is the Lord! O praise Him name forever!
His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim!	His pow'r and glory evermore proclaim!

"Truly he taught us to love one another;" - *Is that a powerful thought to you?*

"His law is love and His gospel is peace" - Everything He talked about had something to do with love. "His gospel," salvation & right standing with Him brings peace in our lives.

"Chains shall He break," "for the slave is our brother" - Jesus is in the business of breaking the chains of addiction, or anything holding us back in our lives. All the people who are enslaved by anything, they are our brother, too. We should want everyone to be set free. We should care about seeing all our brothers/sisters set free.

"And in His name all oppression shall cease." - The name of Jesus is powerful, by the

authority of Jesus, ALL oppression ---> (*all people being exploited, taken advantage of, or being mistreated, including the poor and needy, among many others*) shall cease.

"Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we;" - When we sing hymns they are bring a sweetness to us. Hymns give us a chance to show God how grateful we are.

"Let all within us praise His holy name." - Every bit of ourselves ---> (within us) praise His holy name.

"Christ is the Lord! O praise His name forever!" - Christ is the Lord. We have to make Him our Lord. We have to give our lives completely to Him. We praise Him all the time, now and forever.

"His pow'r and glo---ry ever-more pro-claim!" - (then repeat it again) We proclaim His power, His ability to do whatever is needed in the world. We declare/proclaim His glory for the rest of our lives.

Summary -

The words of "Oh Holy Night" are very scripturally accurate. There is very little artistic license in the entire song. The only thing we do not know, 100%, is if the stars were out and shining. But, we can probably guess that was the case. It certainly adds to the beauty of that special night.

A few minutes of discussion:

Rate the song among your favorites of all Christmas hymns. *Is it in your top 2, 3, 4, 5 favorite?*

What do you love about this song? Are there certain words that really jump out at you?

How do you feel when you sing the song? Do you feel God's presence, feel love, and His peace? Think about those words, what are the feelings that come to you when singing the various words?

Communion -

Communion is a time of remembering. In this case, remembering how really cool was Jesus' birth:

How humble it was being born in a manger setting,

How that God chose shepherds to first tell of Jesus' birth.
How God sent angels, and a huge heavenly host to celebrate.
How the baby must have looked all wrapped up, His face glowing.
How the sharing time from the shepherds must have been so fascinating.
How that there were probably others there from the Inn.
How the sharing time probably went back and forth from the shepherds to Joseph & Mary.
How Mary, being a great mom, treasured these things in her heart.
How the shepherds returned to the fields while glorifying God.
How men of God wrote down the things Jesus said so we can try to live by it.
How this perfect Jesus died on a cross for our sins, falsely accused, mistreated by men.
How we are meant to make Jesus our Lord and accomplish God's will in our own lives.
How we are thankful to sing sweet hymns of joy and we show praise to our God.

(Communion elements being handed out)

Approximately 33 years after Jesus' birth it was night, and He was with His disciples eating:

Matthew 26:26-30 (NKJV)

²⁶ And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, & gave *it* to the disciples and said, "**Take, eat; this is My body.**"

²⁷ Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, "**Drink from it, all of you.**"

²⁸ **For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.**

²⁹ **But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."**

³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Closing Song: O Holy Night, Pg 183 in your hymnals.

Closing Prayer: Lee Conner