



Silent Night: Christmas Eve Service

The great Christmas Hymn “Silent Night” was written in 1816 by a young priest in Austria, Joseph Mohr. Austria had just gone through a tumultuous time with the Napoleonic wars. As the story goes, the priest went for a walk, and as he looked out over a very quiet, winter-laden town, he was inspired by the beauty of the white snow and the silence it carried with it. He literally experienced a “silent night,” a “holy night.”

As we gather together this Christmas Eve, maybe your life has been tumultuous. At the least, I am sure it has been busy and quite possibly chaotic. No doubt, our world seems to become more and more tumultuous by the minute. In light of these things, today, I want us to do our best to experience the silence and the holiness that is found in the presence of God.

To do that, let’s reflect on the comforting words of a Psalm written some 700 years before Christ was born in a manger, Psalm 46.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever–present help in trouble. Psalm 46:1

This is what we celebrate this Christmas and every Christmas. When we were helpless and weak, God showed up in a way that we could relate to, helpless and weak. A baby in a manger. However, that baby was our refuge and strength. I love the term “ever-present”. It reminds us that while God became physically present in Jesus Christ on that first Christmas, it also reminds us that he would not just be present for a time. That baby would grow up and say, “I am with you always.”

Not only that, but Jesus is the “ever-present”! That is, he is the best Christmas present ever and the gift that keeps on giving. For he gives abundant life and eternal life.

The Psalm goes on:

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Psalm 46:2–3

If this beautiful gift of Jesus, the ever presence of God, provides refuge, strength, and help in troubled times, we will not fear!

Too much of our lives are lived in fear. However, time and again, we hear the voice of the angels say, "Fear not" in our Christmas stories. The Psalmist reminds us not to fear about anything. "Though the earth gives way, the mountains fall, the waters roar." That is some scary stuff. In essence, even if you feel your world is falling apart, choose not to fear. Why? Because the whole story of Christmas is that God is with us!

Psalm 46 then draws a picture of what God with us is like:

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. Psalm 46:4–6

Sitting beside a river can be so soothing. Studies have proven that running water has a stress-reducing effect that is not found in music or silence. The river in this verse is a metaphor for God's strength, peace, and the hope and refreshment that only God can provide. At the same time, the strong current of a river is so powerful. This illustration is a beautiful picture of the power and peace that only God provides.

The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come and see what the LORD has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. Psalm 46:7–9

There is that phrase again: The Lord is with us. In the Christmas story recorded in Matthew, we are reminded that Isaiah prophesied, "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel." That name means "God with us." The same God who created the world and put us in the garden with him never stopped wanting to be with us. In his great plan, he would come and not only be with us but save us from ourselves so that we could be together forever.

He is mighty. He is all powerful. He has brought desolation to the earth and he has made wars cease. The all mighty, powerful God is a God of peace. The same peace the angels mention to the shepherds when they cried out, "Peace on earth, good will to all."

So why would we be reading a Psalm that was written some 700 years before Christ was born in the manger? Is there a prophecy in it? Does it somehow mention the coming Messiah? No, not at all. Remember, we are looking for the silence

and holiness that is found in the presence of God. The “mighty river” God. The “ever-present” God. The “fortress God”. The God who “makes wars cease”. The God we find in Psalm 46.

You see, the Psalmist was not just bragging about God; he was leading us somewhere. To a place of peace and holiness. Look closely:

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Psalm 46:10–11

The psalmist is now quoting the Lord himself. Can you hear him? “Be still.” Oh, how we want to. We want to be still. But there is so much to do. Life is chaotic. Our world is tumultuous. You may be thinking, “Be still? I’m lucky not to fall out of the boat!” Good news! That baby in the manger would grow up and find himself with a group of fishermen in a tumultuous, chaotic storm. And what did he do? He stood to his feet, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Be still!” And the storm listened.

How do we experience a “silent” and “holy” night? We choose to be still. We choose to let go of trying to fix and control everything. We choose to be still as an act of faith. Faith that God is God and I don’t have to be. We choose to be still for a moment, and instead of worrying about the world, we trust that God will be exalted among the nations. God will be exalted in the earth. And we remember, “The Lord Almighty is with us!”

Tonight, as we celebrate the birth of Christ, we are reminded that He is our refuge. Just as the psalmist encourages us to “be still and know that I am God,” let us take a moment to pause, reflect, and embrace the tranquility that comes from trusting in His divine plan. In the midst of our celebrations, we can find solace in knowing that God is with us, guiding us through every storm.

(NOW WOULD BE A GOOD TIME TO TURN OUT THE LIGHTS AND SIT IN THE HOLY SILENCE OF THE LORD. SIT IN THE SILENCE FOR AT LEAST A WHOLE MINUTE IF NOT LONGER. LET THE SILENCE BE BROKEN BY AN A CAPELLA SOLOIST SINGING “SILENT NIGHT” AS YOU BEGIN LIGHTING CANDLES)

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. May this Christmas Eve fill our hearts with peace, joy, and the assurance that we are never alone.