

## About the hymn “Silent Night”

The words to “Silent Night” were written by Joseph Mohr (1792-1848), an Austrian Roman Catholic priest and set to music by Franz Gruber (1787-1863). Joseph Mohr was serving as an assistant priest at St. Nicholas Church in Oberndorf, in the Austrian Tyrol, when he wrote the words of the carol in 1816. Mohr brought the text to Gruber who was the village schoolmaster and church organist. Gruber composed the music and the carol was played and sung for the first time, accompanied by Gruber on his guitar, on Dec. 24, 1818. A popular story associated with the carol says that the church’s organ was broken in December 1818 and it was the prospect of having no music on Christmas Eve that occasioned the carol’s first performance.

Soon after the 1818 Christmas Eve Mass, organ repairman Karl Mauracher came to the church and obtained a copy of the new carol. Through his influence the carol spread throughout the entire Tyrol region, where it became popular as a Tyrolean folk song. In 1838 it first appeared in a German hymnal. It was first heard in the United States in 1839 when a family of Tyrolean singers, the Rainers, used the music during their concert tour. The English translation most widely used in North America, is that of John Freeman Young (1820-1885) an Episcopal priest (later bishop). Young’s translation appeared in 1863, and this version is used in the Anglican Church of Canada’s hymn book *Common Praise*.

During World War One, “Silent Night” was sung simultaneously in French, English and German by troops during the Christmas Truce of 1914. It was one of the few carols that was known by soldiers on both sides of the front line.

A website (“Silent Night Web”) dedicated to the carol states that it has been translated into over 140 languages not including the Naskapi and Kwakwaka’wakw translations included in *Common Praise*.



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