

THE SILENT NIGHT PROJECT

Sing on November 28

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON OUTLINE

Unexpected Peace

THE SILENT NIGHT PROJECT

November 28, 2010

By Beth Baskin

This lesson was written for the Silent Night Project, produced by the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada. All Canadian Anglicans are encouraged to film themselves singing “Silent Night” on Nov. 28, and this lesson is designed to help you incorporate Advent and hymn themes into the Sunday School material on that day. Please see the website to learn more about the Silent Night Project: www.anglican.ca/silentnight

Two years ago, Canadian Anglicans were encouraged to sing “Amazing Grace” and sing they did—in formal choirs, in Sunday School classes, and in nursing homes. Over 500 videos were sent in and incorporated into a documentary, *Amazing Together*. Together we raised over \$95,000 that is being used by the Council of the North to save lives through suicide prevention work.

This time we are being invited to sing “Silent Night” and offer our toonies to support Anglican military chaplains who minister to the women and men of the Canadian Forces. If you wish to discuss the work they do and how this project is supporting their work you will find some videos on www.anglican.ca/silentnight and more information on their website www.anglican.ca/amo/.

Preparation

- Read the readings for Advent I year A: <http://1.anglican.ca/b8p3gN>
- Read the lyrics for “Silent Night”: <http://1.anglican.ca/aD73yh> [PDF]
- Read over the lesson so that you are familiar with the activities. Depending on the age of the children you may want to skip some of the talking parts and spend more time on activities.
- Gather the materials that you will need for each section of the lesson.

Materials needed

- A purple or blue candle or Advent wreath with matches
- Bible and bookmark
- Purple or blue cloth depending on the colours of vestments in church (optional)

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- Copies of “Silent Night” lyrics
- An audio recording of “Silent Night” or someone who will lead the group in singing
- Optional resources:
 - The book *Silent Night: The Song and Its Story* (paperback) by Margaret Hodges, Tim Ladwig
 - *The Story of Silent Night* DVD with the Vienna Boys Choir by Questar Video (55 mins)
- Choose what you need for the activity you plan to do
 - Colouring sheets and colouring materials
 - Dove templates, large sheet of paper, colouring materials
 - Paper, pens, and envelopes if writing letters
 - Cookie ingredients

Gathering

Open as you normally would or consider a more formal opening to mark the beginning of Advent.

- Gather in a circle around a small table or simply create sacred space by placing the cloth, candle or wreath and Bible in the middle of the circle.
- Light the candle or wreath.
- Explain that by lighting the candle we are remembering that God is always in our midst and as children of God we are connected to people across Canada and around the world. (Depending on the age of the children, you may want to put the candle somewhere safe where it can be seen but not touched at this point.)
- Tell the children that today we are going to learn about a hymn that you probably already know and talk about silence and peace in our lives.
- Together we pray:

Dear God,
We give thanks for music and stories and the people who write them.
Help us to learn your lessons through our time together today.
Amen

Introduction

- Sing “Silent Night,” read the story book, or play a DVD excerpt.
- Ask the children if they remember when they first learned this carol. Give them some time to tell you stories about it.
- Share the story of how it was written found at www.anglican.ca/silentnight or in the appendix.
- Look at the words together and invite the children who are old enough to read the verses aloud. Talk about some of the funny phrases and have them suggest how you might modernize the words.

Exploring the theme

- Talk about how the carol has been translated into many languages and how music can overcome borders and boundaries.
- Tell the story of the World War I truce found in the appendix.
- Encourage them to imagine what that must have been like.

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Discussion option 1: Peace and the unexpected

- Talk about peace and the unexpected.
- Isaiah 2:1-5 speaks of turning swords into ploughshares. Ploughshares are tools used to till the land and grow food that nourishes life. When the soldiers put down their weapons and shared from their care packages they created a moment of peace, a moment of unexpected goodness and sharing.
- How can we find ways to create peace? (Examples: choosing not to fight with siblings, standing up for someone who is being bullied, making donations to organizations working for peace, writing letters to support those working for peace.)
- The gospel reading for today, Matthew 24:36-44, tells us to be ready and expect the unexpected.
- What do you think the soldiers must have thought at that moment? They did not expect to cross no man's land. What did the churchgoers think that Christmas Eve with a broken organ?
- How can we be ready for the unexpected?

Discussion option 2: Exploring the idea of silence

- Talk about what silence means.
- Why do we need silence? (Examples: to hear one another, to notice nature, to experience peace and quiet, to pay attention to our bodies, to listen for God, etc.)
- How do we use silence? (Examples: to pray, to prepare for sleep, to honour veterans, and others who have died, to think, to plan, etc.)

Theme activities

- Doves are a universal sign of peace and the Holy Spirit. Have a dove template available for tracing or already cut out depending on the age of the children. You can find a good one through this website www.radiantpeace.org/games.html. Have each child decorate their dove and mount them together on paper for a banner that can be taken into church.
- Suitable for children 10 or older—If you have the ability, show the children the videos about military chaplains or tell them some of the stories you read on www.anglican.ca/amo. Invite them to write letters to the 85 Anglican chaplains supporting them in their work. Find out where to direct your letters by visiting www.anglican.ca/amo/contacts/.
- Make a coupon book. Encourage the children to make coupons that will make their home a more peaceful place, for example “five minutes of peace and quiet,” “I will stop fighting,” or other offers of time and energy. These can be made very simply by cutting construction paper up into appropriate sizes and stapling the book together when done. For some examples look here www.dltk-holidays.com/xmas/mcoupons.html
- Make “manger cookies” to anticipate Advent. You will need chow mein noodles, butterscotch chips and pink (or another colour) jelly beans. Melt the butterscotch chips in the microwave or on top of a double-boiler, remove from heat, stir in chow mein noodles until well-covered. Scoop out piles with a spoon and shape them to look like little hay beds. Put a jelly bean in to represent the baby Jesus. A cuddle with a baby can be a very peaceful moment and you might want to accompany these cookies with a note or wish for peace. The original idea can be found here: www.oklahomahomeschool.com/christmasunit.html
- If you would like some colouring sheets that tell the nativity story you can find them here www.christiananswers.net/kids/clr-indx.html#bible. Number #71 is a picture of carolling and # 50–56 are nativity scenes

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Closing

- Gather around your candle or wreath again.
- Remind the children that even though we will blow out the candle and leave this place, God stays with us.
- Close with a prayer:

Dear God

We give thanks for quiet in our lives.

We remember those who work for peace in the world,
and we promise to work peace in our lives.

Amen.

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Appendix I – The writing of “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 December 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*.

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Appendix II – The truce created by “Silent Night”

It was Christmas Eve, 1914, during the early months of World War I. When the Germans had left their country earlier in the year, they expected to be home by Christmas to celebrate their victory. The young men, however, were not home by Christmas and the war dragged on for four more years. Europe, and the world, would never be the same again.

By December of 1914, trench warfare along the 200 mile front was proving to be a difficult and deadly form of battle. The trenches were filled with mud, vermin and death. Christmas of 1914 was particularly cold, freezing the slush and water of the trenches in which the men hunkered down.

Yet, on December 24, along the trenches of the western front, British and Scottish soldiers heard a startling sound—the sound of singing. And it was a song they instantly recognized, even if they did not understand the words. The song was “Silent Night,” or as the Germans sang it, *Stille nacht, heilige nacht*.

Shocked by this strange yet welcome sound, one by one, the English began singing back to the Germans their version of this beautiful melody. Soon, voices on both sides filled the air with the strains of “Silent Night.”

As they looked across to the enemy trenches, the Allies began to spot candles raised on poles or bayonets. And even more incredibly, the English officers reported that some enemy troops were holding Christmas trees over their heads. Soldiers from both sides, who had just hours before had been killing one another, tentatively began to emerge from their trenches and to venture into the dreaded “no man’s land” bringing good cheer and gifts from their kits—and to bury their dead.

Against all odds, a spontaneous, one-day truce had begun, a truce that ignored all the rules of military conduct. Not everyone approved, however. Some officers tried to discourage the “fraternization,” and one Austrian soldier billeted near Ypres complained that in wartime such “an understanding should not be allowed.”

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