

THE STORY OF SILENT NIGHT

By Clyde H. Dennis

On Christmas Eve in 1818, Franz Gruber, church organist in the little town of Oberndorf, Bavaria, made an alarming discovery. The organ would not play!

For several days previous to Christmas Eve, Oberndorf had been snow-bound. Gruber, knowing there was no one in Oberndorf capable of repairing the organ, was afraid there would be no music for Christmas. He could hardly imagine Christmas without music.

Quickly he went to the vicar, Joseph Mohr, and told him the story. He asked Mohr to write a new Christmas song which could be easily sung without the use of the organ.

Later as Mohr sat reading Christmas stories from his Bible . . . "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour . . ." the words welled up in his soul like a heavenly anthem. Long into the night he sat meditating on them. As the full meaning gripped his soul, he wrote a poem about the wondrous story.

Early the next day, Gruber took the newly written words and composed a melody. Now the people were gathering at the church. There was one man who could pick out tunes on a guitar. He was asked to accompany the new carol.

The people of Oberndorf loved the song immediately . . . and thus Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber gave to the world one of the most beautiful and best loved of the Christmas carols. It was not long before the Tyrolean Singers took the song to America. For years it went under the title, "Song from Heaven." It was more quickly and better known in America than in Europe and today, "Silent Night" is sung in nearly every language of the world.

Oh, that the real meaning of Christmas would grip each one this season as, like Joseph Mohr, you consider these glorious words: "Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). This Saviour is unto you . . . you who have gone astray, you who are burdened with many cares, you who need the forgiveness of sin.

Christ the Lord came into this world for you. He died on the cross for you. He shed His precious blood for the putting away of your sins.

Tonight will be a "silent night" and a "holy night" in your soul if you will trust in the Saviour, Christ the Lord. "God loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I. John 4:10).

THE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us".

Christmas is a commemoration of this sublime fact. It is, therefore, more than a holiday. It commemorates the birthday of the King of Kings. All the customs we associate with the day—giving, caroling, visiting, arise out of the nature of that first Christmas, an event that easily holds first place in the annals of history. On this day a New Dispensation began, a new Calendar, and a new Creed. Well might the poet sing: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

Go back to that night in Bethlehem and one finds the whole setting wrapped in solemn

yet magnificent mystery. A virgin, yet a mother; a son, yet a Saviour; a helpless infant, yet the Eternal God. Heavenly choirs, wondering shepherds, worshipping wise-men, these all abound in mystery, yet are but a part of the greater Mystery—the mystery of the Incarnation, the word, Immanuel.

The Word, "was made flesh." There never was a time when the Word was not. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God, and the Word was with God." But, at that first Christmas, the Word was made flesh. God came down to us. He drew up into Himself all that is perfect man. The babe, presented to the world by Mary, possessed in His Person all the attributes of Deity and perfect manhood. The crowning condescension of God and the highest exaltation of man met in Him, who is the Word, "made flesh." The qualifications of a world Redeemer—One who could represent the lowest of the low, and satisfy the Highest of the High, were found in Him. Mortal, that He might die, Eternal, that He might live; Human, that He might sympathize; Holy, that He might honour; Sinless, that He might atone; Sovereign, that He might forgive. The perfect Sacrifice, the perfect Saviour—Christ the Lord.

Added to the greatness of the first, is the glory of the second: "And dwelt among us." How much would have been lost to humanity had it not been so. Christ honored us with a lengthy visit, considering. He lived through the stages of babyhood, boyhood and manhood. He played, He worked, He taught. He slighted nothing. On the eve of His going He said, "I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do." During His sojourn on earth we come to know, quite intimately, the God that was, and is, and is to come. He made such an impression upon the world that we who live today seem to have all but seen Him. A familiar figure on the highways of earth, we seem still to follow along, and to be challenged by His manliness. Since God, the Invisible, is what we have seen Him to be in the Person of Jesus Christ, we can cast away all our fears, and coming to Him find pardon and purity.

Shall we not guard ourselves against a commercialized Christmas that makes only for distraction and confusion, and recognizing the exalted place that man found in God when the "Word was made flesh," let us unite our hearts in praise to Him who bears the Name, Son of God, and Son of Man.

"EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US"

By F. A. Dunlop

"God, with us". How can its meaning be misunderstood! So emphatic is the statement; so unmistakably clear. We ought not to be confused in the Person. Surely, the Christian mind knows nothing of "Gods many or Lords many". "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God." When the Scriptures introduce us to God, what room can there be for mistaken identity? Moreover, in the double identification, the inspired historian seems to say, "If perchance you may not know who is meant by the name Emmanuel, I will tell you,—it means, God, God with us."

As we journey to Bethlehem again this Christmas Season, and there gaze upon that stable scene, some thoughts are borne in on our minds that move us, hold us. Yes, and rebuke us.

What a rebuke to our needless fears! Think of the challenge that stable scene was to all the forces of sin and hate and hell. A helpless

infant nestled by the side of a woman — an infant, upon whose safety depends the Redemption of the world. Devils are acquainted with the purpose of His mission; kings are enraged at the announcement of His arrival, but what difference since that little human frame encompasses indestructible, eternal Omnipotence. I seem to hear God saying, "Crowd Me out of the Inn, if you will; make My first home a stable if needs be; engage the armies of earth and hell in a supreme effort to destroy Me, but know this, 'I shall live until I have set judgment in the earth, and the Isles shall wait for My law. I am the Lord, that is My Name, and My glory will I not give to another.'" Here is God reduced to the status of a helpless infant, let down into a hostile, God-hating world to live, and live He did. Oh my soul, let that infant speak again, and as He speaks cast your fears to the winds. If He was "Master that day", and He was, He will never be weaker throughout the eternities. Back across the centuries I hear a voice saying, "He hath laid help on One that is Mighty." Yes, and Two Thousand years of history spreads its pages before us to declare the awful surety of the claim. Read, if you will, but one page of that history: A threat had come from Herod, and this was the reply, "Go tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." You never could get Jesus to admit of defeat. He bowed to death only that He might become its Master; He moved in triumph throughout the realms of spirit world; He left the sepulchre destitute of everything excepting a few grave clothes, and yet after all this, what a time we have convincing ourselves that He is able to deliver us.

As we behold that holy scene again this Christmas may it stamp this message deep upon our hearts: God, and all that is God's are secure.

"O' He's a Friend of mine,
And He with me doth all things share;
Since I am His and He is mine,
Why should I have a care?
Yes, Jesus is a Friend of mine."

MY PRAYER

Let me be a little kinder,
Let me be a little blinder
To the faults of those about me;
Let me praise a little more;
Let me be, when I am weary,
Just a little bit more cheery;
Let me serve a little better
Those that I am striving for.
Let me be a little braver
When temptations bid me waiver,
Let me strive a little harder
To be all that I should be;
Let me be a little meeker
With the brother that is weaker;
Let me think more of my neighbor
And a little less of me.—Selected.

COMMISSIONED

Out from the realm of the glory-light
Into the far-away land of night,
Out from the bliss of worshipful Son
Into the pain of hatred and wrong,
Out from the holy rapture above
Into the grief of rejected love,
Out from the life of the Father's side
Into the death of the crucified,
Out of high honor and into shame,
The Master willingly, gladly came;
And now, since He may not suffer anew,
As the Father sent Him so sendeth He you.
—Selected