

Column

What would Christmas be without carols? Many have interesting stories behind them.

Perhaps the best known is that of "Silent Night". Joseph Mohr, assistant priest at the Church of St. Nicholas, Oberndorf, Upper Austria, wrote the words, and his organist Franz Gruber, at Mohr's request, composed the melody. On Christmas Eve 1818, the now much-beloved carol was sung with only a guitar for an accompaniment because the church organ was out of order . . . some versions of the story say mice had wreaked havoc with the bellows!

The silent organ, as it turned out, helped popularise the song. When Karl Mauracher came to repair the instrument, Gruber played the new carol. So taken by it, Mauracher requested a copy and took it back with him to his own village of Zillerthal, where it became popular.

But there is more to the story still -- four daughters of a Zillerthal glove maker learned the song and began singing it at concerts from town to town while their father sold gloves. Soon its fame spread throughout the whole region and beyond.

In 1863, John Freeman Young, an Episcopal clergyman, translated the carol into English. Young went on to become the second Bishop of Florida in 1867. No doubt he took the carol with him and introduced it to the congregations under his oversight.

By the time of the First World War the carol was had also spread to England and served as a catalyst for men on both sides of the trenches to lay down their arms and join in a spontaneous celebration of our Lord's birth on Christmas Day 1914.

Even in the worst of conditions, its simple words pierced through the darkness and brought light: All was calm, all was bright, albeit for a moment.

The good news is this light really didn't go out. It's still available to those who seek it -- whatever their circumstances or place.

Where might it be found? John, in the prologue to the Fourth Gospel, tells us: "In him [in the Word made flesh] was life, and the life was the light of

men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" John 1:4,5 RSV).

Christ is born! Glorify Him. Walk in His light.

O GOD, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the birth of thine only Son Jesus Christ; Grant that as we joyfully receive him for our Redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our Judge, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

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