

## *Silent night, holy night! All is calm, all is bright...a holy night, to be sure.*

But hardly silent and anything but calm. That night in Bethlehem we remember this night was anything but silent.

The “silence” of this night was shattered by the blood-curdling cries of wild animals roaming the hillsides. In a cold, dark cave a young, frightened woman gave birth to her child while her carpenter-husband stood by helplessly. Finally, amid the bleating of the sheep and the braying of the animals surrounding the little family, the sound of the newborn's first cry of life broke the stillness. This “silent night” was filled with terror, pain and bone-numbing exhaustion that sleep alone cannot relieve.

There was no “silence” this night in crowded, chaotic Bethlehem, a little hamlet bursting at the seams with visitors and travelers who had come for the great census. There was, in fact, no “calm” in all of Israel – only tension and conflict between the Jewish people and their Roman occupiers. Ancient Palestine was hardly a place of “heavenly peace” – it was a land torn apart by oppression, persecution and terror.

“Silent night?” Listen again.

“All is calm?” Madness reigned.

And yet on this noisy, chaotic, anxious night, Christ was born. Hidden in a dark cave, the light of Christ dawned. Amid the pain and anguish of a devastated people, Christ came with new hope and transforming joy.

In the middle of our own dark nights of pain and anguish, God comes and transforms them into “holy” nights of His peace. Amid the noise and clamor that consume us, the voice of God speaks to us in the “silence” of our hearts. May we have hearts to embrace the “silence” of God in our midst and spirits to welcome the “holiness” of Christ, who is the very peace and compassion of God. May this night transform all of our nights and days in the “brightness” of “heavenly peace.” May this holy feast be a blessing for you and for all you love in whatever circumstances we find ourselves – a blessed Christmas to one and all.

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