

THE STORY OF SILENT NIGHT

by Michael C. Vigilant



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The Story of Silent Night

A small cast play with music

by MICHAEL C. VIGILANT

CAST OF CHARACTERS

NARRATOR

FRANZ GRUBER

JOSEPH MOHR

CHURCH CHOIR

STRASSER FAMILY

PRODUCTION NOTES

This Christmas play is easy to stage. Its short length means it may easily be incorporated into a worship service any time during the holiday season. The small cast is conducive to easy rehearsals. The actors playing Franz Gruber and Joseph Mohr should have strong singing voices. It is preferred that the person playing the part of Franz Gruber knows how to play guitar. If this isn't possible, a guitar-playing member of the congregation may accompany the singers. Guitar chords are included with the lyrics to "Silent Night" on pages four and five. The Strasser Family may be comprised of a sub-group from the choir (three to six persons) or by an actual family with singing ability from your congregation.

TIME — Christmas Eve, 1818.

SETTING — The opening scene takes place in Franz Gruber's music room at the church. The room is furnished with a desk Stage Right which has manuscript paper and a quill pen upon it. A guitar is set on a stand next to the desk in plain sight of the audience. In addition, a Christmas tree is located at Right Center, a coat rack is at Left Center and a small table with two chairs on either side is at Center Stage. Extra touches should include some book shelves, at least one cross, and miscellaneous greenery or a wreath for decoration. A podium for the Narrator should be placed at an extreme side of the stage.

COSTUMES — Franz Gruber is dressed in 19th-century formal attire. Dark coat with tails, an ascot, ruffled shirt and vest. Joseph Mohr is dressed in a monk's robe with a rope belt. Upon entering Franz Gruber's room, he wears a wide-brimmed hat.

The Choir and Strasser Family are attired in choir robes. The Choir and Strasser Family, however, should wear different colored robes with the latter's being more elaborate (multi-colored and/or additional embroidery).

The Narrator need only be well-dressed by present day standards.

1 **NARRATOR:** Every Christmas is special. But sometimes
 2 something happens at a particular Christmas which
 3 makes it stand out from the rest. One such Christmas
 4 occurred over a century and a half ago in a small village
 5 in the Austrian Alps. That's where circumstances
 6 inspired two friends — Franz Gruber, a church organist
 7 and composer, and Joseph Mohr, a priest and poet — to
 8 create one of the most beautiful carols ever written.
 9 *(Lights rise on FRANZ GRUBER. He is pacing anxiously as*
 10 *NARRATOR continues.)* The story of *Silent Night* begins
 11 on Christmas Eve in the year 1818. Franz Gruber was in
 12 a state of near despair because the church organ was
 13 broken. With midnight services only hours away, he did
 14 not know what to do.

15 **FRANZ:** *(Knock on door.)* I can't believe it! *(Knock on door.)* How
 16 can this happen? *(Knock becomes louder.)* And on Christmas
 17 Eve, no less. *(Knock becomes even louder.)* What a disaster!
 18 *(Knock becomes a bang.)* Oh, come in!

19 **JOSEPH:** *(Enter JOSEPH MOHR. As he speaks, he hangs up his*
 20 *hat and coat. His mood is very jovial.)* What a glorious day!
 21 The snow is falling, children are laughing, feasts are
 22 cooking — I love this time of year. *(Throwing his arms*
 23 *around FRANZ)* Merry Christmas, Franz!

24 **FRANZ:** It might be Christmas, Joseph, but it's not so merry.

25 **JOSEPH:** My goodness, Franz. Why so glum? Wait a minute . . .
 26 Are you upset because you forgot to get me a present
 27 again this year? You poor man. You must be absolutely
 28 guilt-ridden. Well, don't worry, I forgive you. Just don't
 29 let it happen again.

30 **FRANZ:** I wish my problem was so simple.

31 **JOSEPH:** What could be worse than forgetting my present?

32 **FRANZ:** *(With great concern)* The church organ is broken.

33 **JOSEPH:** *(Taken aback)* What?! It can't be broken. It's
 34 Christmas Eve. You have music to play. The choir has
 35 carols to sing.

- 1 **FRANZ:** I know, I know.
- 2 **JOSEPH:** Well, maybe that organ just has a loose part or two.
- 3 How about I go out there and give it a whack with the
- 4 ol' iron fist? I'll put that organ in line. (*Heading for the*
- 5 *door*) Breakdown on Christmas Eve — how inconsiderate.
- 6 **FRANZ:** Joseph, don't touch that organ! I've already called
- 7 the repairman.
- 8 **JOSEPH:** Great. When will he get here?
- 9 **FRANZ:** Unfortunately, not until sometime after Christmas.
- 10 **JOSEPH:** After Christmas! What good will that do?
- 11 **FRANZ:** Not much, I'm afraid.
- 12 **JOSEPH:** (*Raising fist*) Are you sure you don't want me to use
- 13 my iron fist?
- 14 **FRANZ:** Put that hand away. You might hurt yourself.
- 15 **JOSEPH:** (*Putting hand in pocket*) Just trying to help.
- 16 **FRANZ:** (*After a short pause*) Well, we can't just sit here. Let's
- 17 do something.
- 18 **JOSEPH:** You're right. Let me see . . . (*Thinking for a moment*)
- 19 Ah ha! Let's pray. Let's pray for — a *miracle*.
- 20 **FRANZ:** (*Unconvinced*) A miracle? Great idea. Why didn't I
- 21 think of that?
- 22 **JOSEPH:** Because I'm a priest and you're not, my friend.
- 23 Now let's get to it. (*FRANZ and JOSEPH begin to pray,*
- 24 *silently. Suddenly*) I've got it!
- 25 **FRANZ:** What?
- 26 **JOSEPH:** (*Moving over to his coat*) Your Christmas present!
- 27 **FRANZ:** (*Puzzled*) My Christmas present? Joseph, it would be
- 28 a miracle if I remembered to get you a Christmas
- 29 present — not vice versa. Besides, this is no time . . .
- 30 **JOSEPH:** (*Pulling a piece of paper from his coat*) Ah, here it is.
- 31 **FRANZ:** (*Taking paper from JOSEPH*) What's this?
- 32 **JOSEPH:** It's a poem — a gift from me to you.
- 33 **FRANZ:** (*Touched but confused*) Why, thank you, Joseph. You
- 34 know I love your poems and I appreciate the thought . . .
- 35 But don't you think we have other pressing concerns

1 right now?

2 **JOSEPH:** Go ahead and read it.

3 **FRANZ:** But —

4 **JOSEPH:** Please?

5 **FRANZ:** All right, my friend. (*FRANZ begins to read, silently. A*
6 *look of great concentration overtakes his face. While he reads,*
7 *JOSEPH paces like an expectant father as he waits for a reaction.*)

8 **JOSEPH:** (*Circling FRANZ, nervously*) I hope you like it. I
9 honestly think it's the nicest piece I've ever written. But,
10 of course, that's not up to me to decide. (*Losing confidence*)
11 Well, maybe it's not the best thing I've ever written.
12 Maybe it's second or third... You know, I should
13 probably flip-flop the second and third stanzas. But I'll
14 wait and see what you think. (*Becoming upset*) I really think
15 this thing needs some major repair work. (*Exasperatedly*)
16 You hate it, don't you?

17 **FRANZ:** Joseph?

18 **JOSEPH:** (*Anxiously*) Yes?

19 **FRANZ:** This is absolutely — (*Searching for the right word*) —
20 glorious.

21 **JOSEPH:** Glorious? Glorious! (*Thrilled*) He thinks it's
22 glorious!

23 **FRANZ:** You've truly outdone yourself, my friend. Thank you.
24 It's a beautiful gift. But how can I possibly reciprocate?

25 **JOSEPH:** (*Inspired*) Put music to it.

26 **FRANZ:** Put music to it. I can do that. As soon as the organ is
27 fixed, I'll —

28 **JOSEPH:** Put music to it today — so it can be sung tonight.

29 **FRANZ:** (*Searching for an excuse*) But how? The organ —

30 **JOSEPH:** Use your guitar.

31 **FRANZ:** Joseph, I don't know. There's so little time.

32 **JOSEPH:** Start now.

33 **FRANZ:** I — I —

34 **JOSEPH:** Franz, let's turn this into our gift to Jesus.

35 **FRANZ:** I don't know —

- 1 **JOSEPH:** Listen, if the little drummer boy could do it —
- 2 **FRANZ:** (*Picking up his guitar and taking up the challenge*) Little
3 drummer boy, huh? You know, I think I feel a melody
4 coming on.
- 5 **NARRATOR:** Franz and Joseph spent the rest of the
6 afternoon composing, rewriting and anguishing until
7 finally — their song was complete. (*Music begins.*) That
8 evening, it was debuted by the creators themselves,
9 accompanied by a guitar and church choir.
- 10 **FRANZ:** ^C Silent night,
11 Holy night,
12 ^{G7} All is calm,
13 ^C All is bright.
- 14 **JOSEPH:** ^F Round yon virgin
15 ^C Mother and child.
16 ^F Holy infant
17 So tender and mild, ^{G7}
18 **FRANZ and JOSEPH:** ^C Sleep in heavenly peace,
19 ^{G7} ^C Sleep in heavenly peace.
- 20 **NARRATOR:** (*As instrumental continues in background with*
21 *CHOIR humming softly*) *Silent Night* was received with
22 great adulation. And it no doubt would have remained a
23 part of the tiny parish of Oberndorf's Christmas pageant
24 for years to come. But this song had a greater destiny.
25 Remember that organ repairman? Well, he came a few
26 days later, heard this new carol and was so impressed
27 that he proceeded to share it with every church organist
28 on his route. Eventually, the song fell into the hands of
29 The Strasser Family, one of the day's best-known singing
30 troupes. It would be through their voices that Gruber
31 and Mohr's little miracle of a song would become one of
32 the most beloved in the Christian world.
- 33 **THE STRASSER FAMILY:** (*With JOSEPH and FRANZ*)
34 ^C Silent night,
35 Holy night,

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