

Study Guide
Christmas Eve 2017

Theme: Our Story is Jesus' Story

Readings: Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-14

In lieu of a formal study guide, I have chose to share with you something that was written by my seminary professor Dr. Joe Colletti, who founded the Society of Urban Monks.

"You likely heard ***O Holy Night*** sung over the years and moved emotionally by the words and music. The words were written by a French poet, who imagined himself witnessing the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem by using the birth narrative in the Gospel of Luke as his guide. A friend of the poet, who was a trained musician, composed the words.

Stories that surround the popularity of ***O Holy Night*** during the nearly 200 years since first sung on Christmas Eve are inspirational. While the heads of the French Catholic Church tried to ban the song because the songwriter was agnostic and the composer of Jewish ancestry, Church members continued to sing and popularize it.

The minster John Sullivan Dwight, an ardent abolitionist, is credited with bringing the song to the United States. He identified with the following lines in the third verse:

"Truly he taught us to love one another;
his law is love and his gospel is peace.
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother;
and in his name all oppression shall cease."

Stories include how on Christmas Eve in 1871, during the Franco-Prussian War, fierce fighting stopped between French and German soldiers when one soldier began to sing ***O Holy Night*** and others joined in and the fighting ceased while they sung.

On Christmas Eve in 1906, Reginald Fessenden (a former colleague of Thomas Edison), began reading the story of the birth of Christ in the second chapter of Luke while experimenting with a microphone and the telegraph. When he finished, he reportedly picked up his violin and played ***O Holy Night***, which became known as the first radio broadcast of a human voice and song.

In preparation for Christmas Eve, and for Christmas morning, we can cultivate a calm and caring Christmas charm by reading, reflecting, and responding to the words of ***O Holy Night*** if we allow it.

You are also encouraged to use the practice of the antiphon by reading the words to the song that you likely have found the most emotionally moving when hearing ***O Holy Night*** sung as a Christmas carol. Read the words prior to reading the entire lyrics and read the words again immediately afterwards. Then, take some time for reflection and response.

Antiphon:

*Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, the night when Christ was born;
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!*

O Holy Night

O Holy Night! The stars are brightly shining,
It is the night of the dear Saviour's birth.
Long lay the world in sin and error pining.
Till He appeared and the Spirit felt its worth.
A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices,
For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, the night when Christ was born;
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!

Led by the light of faith serenely beaming,
With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand.
O'er the world a star is sweetly gleaming,
Now come the wisemen from out of the Orient land.
The King of kings lay thus lowly manger;
In all our trials born to be our friends.
He knows our need, our weakness is no stranger,
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!
Behold your King! Before him lowly bend!

Truly He taught us to love one another,
His law is love and His gospel is peace.
Chains he shall break, for the slave is our brother.
And in his name all oppression shall cease.
Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,
With all our hearts we praise His holy name.
Christ is the Lord! Then ever, ever praise we,
His power and glory ever more proclaim!
His power and glory ever more proclaim!

Antiphon:

*Fall on your knees! Oh, hear the angel voices!
O night divine, the night when Christ was born;
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!
O night, O Holy Night, O night divine!*

As you slowly savor these sweet sentiments, allow a little time for reflection. And have a very Merry Christmas. See you in 2018!