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Sound doesn't travel very well after a fresh fall of snow. Soft flakes on the ground and up in the trees absorb sound waves. It's why wintertime in Northern Europe can be so still and tranquil. In just such a winter, back in 1818, two Austrian friends wrote a gentle Christmas Carol called Silent Night. It begins like this: "Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright, round yon virgin mother and child. Holy infant, so tender and mild, sleep in heavenly peace..."

These words capture wonder and reverence for that extraordinary moment in time when God clothed himself with human flesh, born of a woman called Mary.

But the reality of Jesus's birth is that, in subtropical Palestine, it rarely snows in Bethlehem. And, given that there was, 'no place for them at the inn' and that Mary and Joseph were forced to find lodging in a house – it's reasonable to speculate that Jesus's birth took place at ground level surrounded by animals. This is because the Bible tells us that Jesus was laid in a 'manger'. This was a feeding trough on the ground floor for certain precious animals kept inside at night for protection and as a kind of central heating system.

Imagine the noise and heat of the animals? Mary's labour was, no doubt, sweaty and traumatic. Certainly nothing in the Bible leads us to believe she was spared a painful birth or made no sound. Really it was anything but a silent night!

Yet, no matter how much we ponder and speculate over the details, there's much we simply can't know. For example was it a 'noisy night' or 'noisy day'? Luke's gospel tells us of an angel appearing to shepherds at night declaring:

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

This could mean Jesus was born at any time of that day or evening up until the appearance of the angel. What is clear though, in this passage and countless others in the Bible, is that Jesus's arrival means salvation for the world – an opportunity for people to reconcile with God. It's why Jesus is called 'Saviour'. He came to save us from our sin.

So, as you sing European Carols this Christmas, don't forget how difficult and noisy that real historical event was. And sing with all your heart because Jesus's coming means the possibility of 'heavenly peace' for everyone. Praise God!

**Prayer.** Dear God, thank you for sending your son into this world, born of a virgin, a Saviour for all the world.

**Bible Verse.** "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11)