

The City Church, New York

The Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession – Sunday December 24, 2005
Christmas Eve

On Christmas Eve, 1818, in St. Nicholas Church at Oberndorf, Austria, Stille Nacht was heard for the very first time. Author Joseph Mohr and composer Franz Gruber sang it as a duet, accompanied on Mohr's guitar for the church organ was broken. Hear it now -- one verse and chorus -- on that original guitar.

Let us pray.

O Cradled Creator: The night's silence was broken by a baby's cry. That cry was Yours. A carol says "no crying he makes," but real baby's cry, so, of course You cried. It was as if to say: "I've come!" The stable's rough sounds were softened by a baby's smile. That smile was Yours – as if to say: "I'm here. It'll all be okay." Angels' assurance to shepherds that they need not fear was confirmed when they saw a little baby in a manger. Yet, O Lord God, that little baby was You. An angel's assurance that Joseph need not fear was confirmed when he saw, not another man's son, but You, O Son of the Father. And an angel's assurance that Mary need not fear was confirmed when she laid her holy child in the straw of a manger. And, Lord, God Almighty, her dear little baby was You.

So we crowd around a cradle to see – who, what? We see You in flesh like ours. We see a baby gurgling and dribbling as we did, and as dependent on a mother's care as we were. Yet, unlike all of us – born without a clue, without a conscious care, vulnerable through no choice of our own – Your vulnerability was voluntary. You didn't find Yourself here; You put Yourself here. And in coming into a world You knew would have Your life, You fulfilled Your promise that the world might, indeed, have Your Life – through Your death and resurrection. O Word of God, You kept Your word in ways we would not write and could not read but by Your light. You came to wage war on all the wrong in this world, to set everything right, and to do it with all the might of Your sacred justice and sacrificial love. And so, tonight, we worship and praise You. We adore You.

On this Silent Night of reflection, on this Holy Night of remembrance, we pray for faith that discerns, in a newborn baby boy, the birth of our redemption, "the hopes and fears of all the years," met in You, O Emmanuel, God with us, here and now and forevermore!

Thank You for always hearing us, as we pray words we were taught us to pray, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.