

O Holy Night

? What are some of your typical feelings toward the Christmas season?

First, take a moment to listen: <https://youtu.be/NU2TlwcH3h4>

Intro and exercise: O Holy Night was originally written in the French town of Roquemaure in 1843, by Placide Cappeau and Adolphe Adam. Cappeau was commissioned by a local priest to write a poem to celebrate some renovations on the church, and Adam later composed a carol. While many similarities exist between the original French lyrics and the English translation, there are some differences as well.

Read through and compare/contrast. Underline ideas that are the same, circle ideas that are different.

Literal French Translation	English Translation (John Sullivan Dwight)
Midnight, Christians, is the solemn hour, When God as man descended unto us To erase the stain of original sin And to end the wrath of His Father. The entire world thrills with hope On this night that gives it a Saviour.	O holy night! The stars are brightly shining, It is the night of our dear Saviour's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Till He appear'd and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices, For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.
People, kneel down, await your deliverance. Christmas, Christmas, here is the Redeemer, Christmas, Christmas, here is the Redeemer!	Fall on your knees! O hear the angel voices! O night divine, O night when Christ was born; O night divine, O night, O night Divine.
May the ardent light of our Faith Guide us all to the cradle of the infant, As in ancient times a brilliant star Guided the Oriental kings there. The King of Kings was born in a humble manger; O mighty ones of today, proud of your greatness,	Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming, With glowing hearts by His cradle we stand. So led by light of a star sweetly gleaming, Here come the wise men from the Orient land. The King of Kings lay thus in lowly manger; In all our trials born to be our friend.
It is to your pride that God preaches. Bow your heads before the Redeemer! Bow your heads before the Redeemer!	He knows our need, to our weaknesses no stranger, Behold your King! Before Him lowly bend! Behold your King, Before Him lowly bend!
The Redeemer has broken every bond The Earth is free, and Heaven is open. He sees a brother where there was only a slave, Love unites those whom iron had chained. Who will tell Him of our gratitude,	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. Sweet hymns of joy in grateful chorus raise we,

For all of us He is born, He suffers and dies.	Let all within us praise His holy name.
People, stand up! Sing of your deliverance, Christmas, Christmas, sing of the Redeemer, Christmas, Christmas, sing of the Redeemer!	Christ is the Lord! O praise His Name forever, His power and glory evermore proclaim. His power and glory evermore proclaim.

Themes And Big Ideas

? What are some themes or motifs used in this carol?

Possible answers: salvation, light, light being followed, Jesus's love showing us to love, the world longing for Jesus

? What ideas do the stanzas communicate?

Possible answers: the first stanza focuses on the hope of a savior, the second stanza on faith in a savior, and the third on loving like our savior. Some verses are more demanding of us than others.

? What themes do the choruses have in common?

Possible answer: each chorus focuses on us worshipping and beholding the Lord, God's divinity and kingship, implied idea of our lowly position before Him.

Looking To Isaiah

Leader's note (possibly read to group): Scripture is always a helpful/beneficial tool. The book of Isaiah is one that outlines many of the themes in this song and we will use it as a guide through the rest of the study.

Brief History of Isaiah: Isaiah is the first book of the Major Prophets in the Old Testament. The focus of the book is one of both judgment (at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians) and salvation (fun fact: the name "Isaiah" means "The Lord Saves"). Much like Cyrus, the Persian, would be an immediate savior of Israel from the hands of the Babylonians, Isaiah points to a future, greater, savior in Jesus; looking forward to the one we now sing about in "O Holy Night"

Stanza 1 - O holy night! The stars are brightly shining

Isaiah 42:1-9

¹ Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. ² He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; ³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. ⁴ He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. ⁵ Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people

on it and spirit to those who walk in it: ⁶“I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, ⁷to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. ⁸I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. ⁹Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.”

? How does this passage connect to the first stanza of the carol?

Possible answers: language about light and darkness, especially blindness. God does not send Jesus to break those ‘pining’ (yearning or deeply longing), but rather to bring them into His fold!

? How does Jesus provide hope for the world?

Possible answers: Jesus came to break the bonds of prisoner, to free the slave, to redeem us from our sin and deliver us from our judgment.

? What has to be true about someone’s experience and/or worldview in order for someone to have hope?

Possible answers: they need to acknowledge brokenness in the world, and that in and of itself, the world cannot be saved.

Stanza 2 - Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming:

Isaiah 51:1-6

¹“Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who seek the Lord: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. ²Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you; for he was but one when I called him, that I might bless him and multiply him. ³For the Lord comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song. ⁴“Give attention to me, my people, and give ear to me, my nation; for a law will go out from me, and I will set my justice for a light to the peoples. ⁵My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out, and my arms will judge the peoples; the coastlands hope for me, and for my arm they wait. ⁶...my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.

? How does this passage connect to the second stanza of the carol?

Possible answers: By faith we seek God’s light as our only hope in this world. Christ alone is the true light (John 1) and through faith in him (Jesus, the true light) we have true hope.

? How does faith in Jesus provide hope for God’s people?

Possible answers: The passage says “My righteousness draws near, my salvation has gone out...my salvation will be forever, and my righteousness will never be dismayed.” God brings restoration, wholeness, and salvation; He is always mindful of us. As the carol says, ultimately it is Jesus who gives us hope. “Led by the light of Faith serenely beaming...In all our trials born to be our friend.”

? How is God's justice a 'light to the peoples'?

Possible answers: it shows a way through the darkness of sin.

Stanza 3 - Truly He taught us to love one another:

Isaiah 58:6-12

⁶ "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, 'Here I am.' If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then shall your light rise in the darkness and your gloom be as the noonday. ¹¹ And the Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. ¹² And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.

? How does this passage connect to the third stanza?

Possible answers: God's message to his people across Scripture is to live out our redemption for the life of the world; the carol specifically names oppression, and 'chains', as does this passage.

? How does Jesus' call on our lives bring love into the world?

Possible answers: our call is to love people! John 13 reminds us of Jesus' example in washing His disciples' feet (even Judas').

? How does that love bring hope to the world?

Possible answers: love should be expressed in bringing restoration, so there is an implication toward real-time and perhaps short-term hope. But our actions are always opportunities for witnessing to the eternal hope God gives us, and this ties back to the first stanza.

For Discussion and Accountability

As we think about how this applies to our lives, notice that each **chorus** is a "call to worship" after reflecting on an aspect of salvation.

? The chorus commands a powerful response to our salvation. Can you recall a time when you felt the impulse to fall to your knees in realization of your salvation?

Possible answers: Answers will vary. This could be an opportunity to share a personal testimony with your group.

? What are some things we can do this year to prepare our hearts for this Christmas season?

Possible answers: read God's word, pray, sing. Remind ourselves and each other what Christmas is all about; that in love, God sent his son to us, that we might have hope in Him through faith in our redeemer.

? Consider your typical feelings toward Christmas. How can this song influence your response to Christmas moving forward?

Possible answers: a focus on thankfulness, praise, worship