

The “Silent Night” locations in SalzburgerLand

The origins of the Christmas song and the chapters in the life of its creator

The way that a short poem with a simple melody was turned into a song, started travelling the world and continues to fill the hearts of people to this day, could almost be described as a miracle. SalzburgerLand is where the priest Joseph Mohr and the teacher Franz Xaver Gruber met for the first time — together, they created “Silent Night” and first performed it on Christmas in 1818 in Oberndorf. There are six additional “Silent Night” locations in SalzburgerLand — all of them represent the various chapters in the lives of the two men that only met briefly but remained connected through their friendship for life. Together, they changed Christmas forever.

City of Salzburg: Joseph Mohr’s childhood, school and training

Joseph Mohr was born on 11 December 1791 as a child out of wedlock, to a knitter and a musketeer of the prince bishop’s guard, at Steingasse 31 in Salzburg and spent his childhood and school time there. He was baptised — as was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart — at Salzburg Cathedral. During his time at the Academic Gymnasium — today’s University of Salzburg with the Large University Auditorium — he earned a little extra income as a singer and violinist for the musical performances of the lyceum and the St. Peter Benedictine monastery at the foot of the Mönchsberg mountain. At the Makartplatz square, he visited the priestly seminary, where he was ordained as a priest at the age of 23. In 1819, he was invited to hold the Lenten sermon at the Salzburg Cathedral — an incredible honour for the young priest.

Experience “Silent Night” here today:

- The **Salzburg Cathedral** with its historic baptismal font can be visited free of charge. The cathedral’s organ was reconstructed by Carl Mauracher. The organ builder from Zillertal brought the song “Silent Night” to his home of Fügen.
- There are **guided city tours** themed around “Silent Night” on offer (Mozart-Wohnhaus, Priesterseminar, St. Peter Benedictine monastery, etc.)
- The famed **Glockenspiel Salzburg** will play the melody of “Silent Night” on 24 December at 07:00, 11:00 the original version of “Silent Night” is traditionally sung at churches.

Arnsdorf: Franz Xaver Gruber’s first domain as a teacher

The little village of Arnsdorf near Oberndorf has been a popular pilgrimage site around the world for centuries. Even pilgrims from the distant Rome came to the “Maria im Mösl” church. Between 1807 and 1829, Franz Xaver Gruber worked as a teacher, sacristan and organist here. After assuming his position, he married — for the sake of social support — Elisabeth Fischinger, his predecessor’s widow, and after her death in 1826, he married Maria Breitfuß. From here, he began “commuting” to Oberndorf in 1816, where he also assumed organ service in order to improve his small income. The melody of “Silent Night” originated in Arnsdorf.

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Experience “Silent Night” here today:

- The oldest still active school building in Austria has been harbouring the **Silent Night Museum** since 1957. After a redevelopment, the museum was awarded the Austrian Seal of Quality for Museums in 2013. It's a place for contemplation and experience, reflecting the simplicity of Gruber's time. A traditionally decorated Rauchkuchl kitchen, where much of family life took place, as well as a historic classroom with the “Gruberpult” and old school desks, provides an inside look into Gruber's daily life. On the ground floor of the building, you can find the classrooms of the Arnsdorf elementary school.
- Next to the “Gruberschule”, you will also find the “**Maria im Mösl**” **pilgrimage church** with the original organ with which Gruber performed his organist service from 1807 to 1829. In the richly decorated late-Gothic church, you will see Madonna and Baby Jesus at the impressive high altar, which probably originated from the workshop of the well-known sculptor, painter and altar builder Michael Pacher.
- The **church bells** will ring to the tune of the world-famous “Silent Night” melody.
- The **Gruber-Mohr Memorial Path** connects Arnsdorf and Oberndorf. The 25-kilometre-long **Silent Night route** is a circular cycling trail that also leads through the two villages.
- 1 and 8 December 2019: “**How was that back then, Mr. teacher?**” - Children can experience a school day like it was in 1818 at the Stille Nacht Museum Arnsdorf.
- 24 December 2019: **Traditional Gruber-Mohr memorial celebration and memorial walk.**

Mariapfarr: Joseph Mohr originally composed the song's lyrics as a poem

It was during autumn of 1815 when the 23-year-old Joseph Mohr assumed his first official position after his premature ordination: He became an assistant priest in Mariapfarr in Salzburg's Lungau region and thus returned to his roots unexpectedly. Joseph Mohr's ancestors on his father's side had settled in Lungau since the 17th century. In the year 1995, the only hand-written version of “Silent Night Holy Night” by Joseph Mohr provided proof that Mohr had written the lyrics in 1816 during his time as an assistant priest in Mariapfarr.

Experience “Silent Night” here today:

- The **redesigned Silent Night Museum** will present the theme of *pilgrimage*, as well as its relationship to Silent Night, in various facets. The pathway will be explored from a number of different perspectives — from Joseph Mohr's life journey and the difficult living conditions at his time to the inner and personal ways of every individual and the treasures that made their way into the museum. These include the precious items currently in possession by the Basilica in Mariapfarr from the heyday of pilgrimaging. Among the museum's most treasured pieces are a little silver altar from the year 1443 and the **large Christmas nativity scene** in the reconstructed **Mohr Room**. The collection of around 100 figures originates from the year 1750 and already adorned the nativity scene during Mohr's days.
- The **Pilgrimage Church and Silent Night Basilica “Unsere Liebe Frau”** (our beloved woman) always played a special pastoral and historic role in the Archbishopric of Salzburg. The altar picture “Worship of the Three Kings and the Golden Boy with Curly Hair” is said to have inspired Mohr to create the corresponding lines. After a two-year-long renovation, the church and the altar were consecrated again in August 2016, as well as the new **Silent Night fountain** on the newly developed **Joseph Mohr Platz**. On 5 April 2018, Pope Francis raised the status of the Pilgrimage Church to that of a Basilica Minor by decree. The corresponding festivities took place on 15 August 2018.



Oberndorf: where the song was played for the first time

Oberndorf is located around 20 kilometers north of the city of Salzburg and has become known around the world as the “Silent Night Municipality”. Between 1817 and 1819, Joseph Mohr was active in the community of boatmen, which was separated from Laufen on the Bavarian side just two years earlier, as an assistant priest. The teacher from Arnsdorf, Franz Xaver Gruber, earned an additional income in Oberndorf as an organist. The encounter between the two men led to a friendship that in turn led to the creation of the song “Silent Night”. During the afternoon of 24 December 1818, the assistant priest Mohr handed the teacher Gruber the poem that he had composed in 1816, asking him to add a melody to it. On the evening of the same day, the two men performed the song together after the Christmas mass, with Mohr accompanying it on the guitar.

Experience “Silent Night” here today:

- In the “Silent Night area” of Oberndorf, you will find — in place of the St. Nikola church, which was damaged by continuous flooding and thus removed — the **Silent Night Chapel**. Since 1953, the Silent Night commemoration has been taking place here regularly every Christmas Eve at 17:00, to which countless people from all over the world arrive to hear and sing the “Silent Night” song.
- The old vicarage next to the Silent Night Chapel houses the new “**Silent Night Museum Oberndorf**”. This is where the Silent Night song and its history are presented to visitors on two floors. The museum’s focus is on the time of the creation and dissemination of the Christmas song as well as the environment in which it was created. Unique memorabilia and interactive stations invite visitors to explore. The court of the museum is dedicated to the philosopher and recipient of the Alternative Nobel Prize Leopold Kohr from Oberndorf.
- Another magnet for visitors during the Advent period is the “**Silent Night Special Post Office**”: From there, around 30,000 letters, furnished with a Christmas postage stamp and a special seal, are sent out into the whole world.
- The “**Silent Night Historical Event**” takes place in the first two weeks of the Advent (30 November/ 1 December and 7/ 8 December 2019) in Oberndorf and Laufen. Following a historical introduction by the Silent Night orchestra in Oberndorf, the event moves across the Salzachbrücke bridge to Laufen in Bavaria, where the historical event is performed with the ensemble of the Schiffertheater Laufen.
- 22 November to 26 December 2019: **Christmas Market** on the Silent Night Square with Christmas market activities and a romantic supporting program.
- 24 December 2019: **Traditional Silent Night commemoration** in front of the Silent Night Chapel
- Throughout the whole year, “**Silent Night**” **performances** at the chapel and in the museum in Oberndorf, as well as circular trails through the town and region, are on offer.

Hintersee: Joseph Mohr’s very own parish for eight and a half years

Before Joseph Mohr came to Hintersee in 1828, he had already served the village with “272 Catholics” provisionally for a whole year. After several years of travel — Mohr had left Oberndorf in 1819 — Mohr was the only applicant for Hintersee: The small town was a bleak pastoral position, but for Mohr, it was his first independent parish in which he remained until 1837. Next to church services, he taught religious education at the school three days a week. He particularly cared about the children and their education. A story about Mohr recounts that he acquired meat from poachers with the aim of giving it away to poor families with many children. Mohr’s presence in Hintersee did not conclude without conflicts and disputes with the authorities.



Experience “Silent Night” here today:

- In Hintersee, a commemorative plaque and a portrait of Mohr in the **parish church**, as well as a Joseph Mohr bust in front of the church, are dedicated to his life and work in the municipality.
- The historic Joseph Mohr house next to the old parish yard contains a cultural centre and a **museum with a permanent exhibition** about Mohr.
- In 2016, the newly built **Joseph Mohr Memorial Chapel** was inaugurated as a place for contemplation and reflection: The interior room of the chapel was designed by the artist Bernd Horak from Hintersee.
- In August 2018 the **Joseph Mohr Memorial Path** leading to the Joseph Mohr Memorial Chapel via various multimedia stations in Hintersee was launched. The idea behind this initiative was to create a combination between figurative painting and abstraction. The art pieces are distributed on six different stations (one per song verse) along the 1.2-kilometre-long circular trail.
- 30 November to 20 December 2019: **Contemplative lantern walk** at Joseph Mohr Memorial Path once a week.

Wagrain: Joseph Mohr’s final work and rest station

From Hintersee, Joseph Mohr switched to Wagrain in 1837, where he lived and worked as a “social vicar” until his death in 1848. He especially cared about the smallest, poorest and those in the lowest social ranks. In his second year in Wagrain, he had already become the main advocate for the construction of a new public school for which he sacrificed most of his wealth. He also bought a water hose for the firefighters and took initiative when it came to looking after the poor and the old. His work left significant traces in Wagrain. Nevertheless, Joseph Mohr was also well known as an affable, social and musical priest. He maintained a church choir and participated as a composer. On 4 December 1848, Joseph Mohr died aged only 56 as a result of a lung disease.

Experience “Silent Night” here today:

- In Wagrain, the **Joseph Mohr Memorial Organ** in the parish church is dedicated to the work of the social vicar. In the side aisle of the church, a memorial plaque reminds of Joseph Mohr as the creator of the song.
- The **Wagrain Cultural Walk** invites visitors to an approximately hour-and-a-half-long hike following the traces of Mohr through the Silent Night district. On this path, you will encounter the parish church in which Mohr worked and the cemetery with Joseph Mohr’s final resting place.
- The newly renovated **Pflegerschlossl** in Wagrain — a former prince-bishop courthouse from the late 18th century — harbours the new **Silent Night Museum** since December 2017: The exhibition areas are dedicated to the life and work of Joseph Mohr in Wagrain, the creation of the song, its international dissemination and its special magic. Additionally, the museum invites its visitors to actively engage with the values of tranquility and peace in an increasingly hectic time.
- 30 November to 21 December 2019: The yearly “**Silent Night Advent Wagrain**” combines the song’s peaceful message with Christmas traditions from all over the world. During the “Advent of Cultures”, the guest countries introduce themselves amongst the group of local exhibitors. Additionally, several Advent concerts take place. At the Christkindl post office (7 December 2019) in the Waggerl House, visitors can beautifully decorate their Christmas letters.
- 11 December 2019: **Guided Wagrain Cultural Walk**
- On 24 December, visitors can also begin feeling festive with **romantic tower music playing** at 22:45 at the parish church and during the Christmas Mass at 23:00.
- 26 December 2019: **Joseph Mohr memorial singing** in the parish church Wagrain



Hallein: Franz Xaver Gruber's final residence and resting place

After his switch from Arnsdorf to Berndorf in 1829, Franz Xaver moved to Hallein with his family in 1835. Now, he was finally able to dedicate his time to his great passion, music. Until his death in 1863, Gruber held the positions of choir conductor and town parish organist. He was also able to express his great range of compositional skills. Thus, he created a series of church music pieces and various compositions for the public. After the death of his second wife, Gruber married Katharina Rieser (widowed Wimmer) from Böckstein in 1842. His oldest son Franz Xaver (*1826) founded the "Halleiner Liedertafel" musical group in 1849, in which Gruber himself was a member and which exists to this day. In Hallein, Gruber also created a document which contains the authorship, location and time of the creation of "Silent Night" in written form. Franz Xaver Gruber died in 1863 aged 76 as a respected and relatively affluent man in Hallein, where he is also buried.

Experience "Silent Night" here today:

- Franz Xaver Gruber's former house at the "Franz Xaver Gruber Platz" right across the **Hallein Town Parish Church** contains the **Silent Night Museum**. It exhibits the entire history of the Christmas song, Joseph Mohr's guitar and various furnishings from Gruber's former residential space, as well the hand-written documents about the song's authorship. The archive harbours three musical inventories of the compositions which Gruber had collected over his time in Hallein.
- **Gruber up close** — during a dramatically staged tour with historical costumes, a member of the Gruber Family will personally recount the story of "Silent Night" with interesting as well as humorous details.
- 24 November 2019: **Singing with Gruber Family** in the Silent Night Museum.
- 25 November 2019: **Contemporaries of Franz Xaver Gruber and Joseph Mohr** - Lecture in the Silent Night Museum Hallein.
- Right in front of the museum, you will find Gruber's final resting place: Every year on 24 December at 17:00, the Halleiner Liedertafel musical group invites guests from all over the world to "**Sing at Gruber's Resting Place**".