

Oh, holy night! The stars brightly shining. It is the night of the 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 glorious morn!

Chorus: Fall on your knees. Oh hear the angel voices. Oh night divine. Oh night when
Christ was born.
Oh night divine. Oh night divine.

The song itself is beautiful in its simplicity. It tells of a night different than all other nights, a night marked as holy. That word "holy" is used 57 times in the Old Testament and 232 times in the New Testament. Both the Hebrew word – qadash – and the Greek word – hagios – mean to set apart, to consecrate, to dedicate. Something that is holy has been set aside for special use. In one of his letters Peter reminds followers of Jesus that we are a "holy priesthood," that we have been set aside and consecrated to do God's work. In fact, Jesus' name in Hebrew means "Yahweh saves," that through Jesus God sets us aside to be used for making God's kingdom known here on earth.

The next line says, "Long lay the world in sin and error pining, til he appeared and the soul felt its worth." The soul felt its worth. I love that phrase! What is your soul's worth? I know a lot of people who think their soul isn't worth much. They find all kinds of ways to downplay their intrinsic value. They listen to the voices – external and internal – that tell them there's nothing holy about them. But through Christ's appearing, our soul has been restored. Our true worth is not defined by what the world says we are or what our critics say we are. Our true worth is grounded in the fact that God sent Jesus to us, that God loves us so much, that our soul is worth so much, that the transcendent God became immanent and dwelt among us. Jesus reminds us that every soul is worth something to God.

The next line may be my favorite line in all the Christmas carols we sing. "The thrill of hope, a weary world rejoices." I'm sure the world into which Jesus came was weary. Weary of Roman occupation. Weary of religious oppression. Weary of waiting for the promise of the Messiah to be fulfilled. Can you relate? What makes us weary these days? Weary of sitting in mall traffic, weary of waiting in checkout lines, weary of being sick, weary of the stresses of the holidays. But I wonder if that fatigue goes deeper. Weary of looking for the right person or the right job. Weary of wondering when life is going to be worth living. Weary of waiting to see if God really cares about us. Just...weary.

What Jesus promises us, the song says, is "the thrill of hope." I love that! When we are given hope, it is thrilling. It bubbles in us like champagne, it makes us smile and giggle and look forward when we've only been looking down. The birth of Jesus signifies an end to all our weariness. We don't have to keep doing things the same way. We don't have to keep asking the same questions. We don't have to wonder if our soul is worth anything. Yonder breaks a new and glorious morn! That line is so wonderful, if only because it allows us to say the word "Yonder," which in my opinion is way underutilized these days. Yonder breaks a new and glorious morn! Jesus is no longer yonder! Jesus is here. Hope is here.

