

## THE VISION FOR LIFE PODCAST

Episode 150 | The Music Of Advent

Featuring: Autumn Gardner and Adam Anglin



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**Autumn:** Welcome to the Vision for Life podcast, an ongoing conversation between the pastors of Fellowship Denver and the church at large. Each week we talk about life, faith, the Bible, and how to follow Jesus as we go about our daily lives. I'm Autumn, the host of the podcast, and Adam is one of our pastors here at Fellowship—he's joining me on the podcast today. Adam, thanks for being with me.

**Adam:** Hello, thanks for having me, Autumn. I'm excited to be here, excited to chat with you.

**Autumn:** Great.

**Adam:** And it's just us today.

**Autumn:** It is, you and me. Yeah, here we go.

**Adam:** This was always the plan.

**Autumn:** This was always the plan, says Adam tongue-in-cheek.

**Adam:** Yeah. I was definitely not a backup plan part two or three.

**Autumn:** Yeah—plan C. Well, thanks for pinch hitting.

**Adam:** No, it's great. I'm excited. Yeah, this is gonna be really fun.

**Autumn:** Last week, Andy and I, one of our other pastors, Andy Barlow, and I talked about Advent, and we're going to continue talking about Advent today from a little bit different perspective. But as we're in the season of Advent as a church family, I've really appreciated the time that I've had both in the conversation with Andy and then as you and I talked about as we put together a discussion for today, I've appreciated the time to just think deeply about the significance of Advent and the themes of Advent. So, I hope that that is encouraging to people as they're listening and engaging our conversation today, that it's fitting for the season that we're in and that it's an encouragement to our church family and everyone listening in regard to the themes of Advent.

In the first episode that we recorded on this topic, we talked about Advent as a season on the Church calendar. And so, you and I are going to return to that, but take a little bit different perspective on it and talk about the historic observation of Advent. So, let's start there. Let's jump in with what is Advent this season that this year in 2023 begins December 3<sup>rd</sup>, ends at Christmas Eve, and leads us up to Christmas.

**Adam:** Yeah. So, if you're tracking along and if you've, I don't know, some of this may be kind of remedial in some ways, if you're familiar with the traditional season of Advent, what it means to the life of the Church, but Advent, if we kind of back all the way up, means “the arrival of a notable person thing or event.” That's literally just the definition. So, for Christians the season is often marked by reflecting on the significance of Christ coming to earth as a child. I think that can be a common, natural default for so many people. It's not so much of a future orientation as it is reflecting on Christ came, He was born. We think of songs like “Away in a Manger” or “Little Town of Bethlehem.” Some of these songs that are kind of like lullabies in a way. That's kind of how they are; it's like there's a sweetness, baby Jesus, you know, all of that. But historically, the significance of the Advent season, liturgically speaking for the Church, was one that was future oriented. An immediate example of this would be the Advent season itself. It's the beginning, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, for us, is

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technically the beginning of the liturgical Church calendar year. So, it is the January 1, if you will, for the Church. New beginnings have a way of orienting us onward towards the future. And so, the very season itself is calling us to look ahead, which I think is just kind of fascinating.

**Autumn:** It is fascinating, especially because culturally we have that frame of mind in the beginning of January. The sort of new year ethos is what we experience then in January. And that feels like a time of looking forward. If we think about the cultural way in which we celebrate the Christmas season, it's often looking back on the year that has just happened. And so, it's interesting that Advent as the beginning of the Church calendar year was historically future oriented, that it encouraged the people of God to look forward.

**Adam:** And so, with that in mind, the first two—if we're kind of breaking down the Advent season by Sundays, there're four of them, like you mentioned—the first two Sundays of Advent are looking towards Christ coming again, His second Advent where He'll come and make all things new. It's a time where we acknowledge the sort of like- people use this term, “the already, but not yet,” which is the present reality that while our hope is secure in Christ, we still exist in a world marked by brokenness, sin, and the longing for wholeness. The biblical example of wholeness is like this picture of Shalom, where everything is set to right and everything is in its right place. It's this idea of peace, perfect peace. So, as we get closer to Christmas morning, the next two weeks kind of in present time of the Advent literally start to move towards celebrating the coming Messiah and the work of the gospel to redeem all people. I'm reminded of Psalm 30, which is titled “My Soul Waits for the Lord.” In that Psalm, the Psalmist is writing about the forgiveness of sins and redemption and it's filled with all of this longing, and that God is going to save His people. And really those, the last two weeks of Advent are really about reflecting on the birth of Christ and celebrating that Christ has come. And so, it's an interesting way to kind of tee up the whole season. We start by looking, the first two weeks, looking for Christ to come again. As we work closer to Christmas day, we're reflecting more and more on His coming the first time, His birth.

**Autumn:** So, during Advent, we mentioned this in our prior episode too, but it bears repeating there are three distinct ways that we celebrate the coming of Jesus. And the first is his first coming when He came as a baby. And we recognize that through the, during the Christmas season, but through the term Emmanuel, that He came as “God with us,” took on flesh and came as a baby. And that was His first coming. And then during the season of Advent, we also anticipate His second coming. And Advent encourages us to recognize that there's a present sense in which we experience His coming through the presence of the Spirit with us. So, the season of Advent gives us space to reflect on all of those. And you're saying there's a real movement historically through the season of Advent in which the Church initially, in the first couple of weeks of Advent, looked towards the future coming of Christ. So, it's a future orientation during those first couple of weeks of the season. And then a subtle shift into reflection on, but Jesus did come. We look back to His first coming as a baby and recognize that He fulfilled that longing that was expressed in the Psalm that you just mentioned when He came as Messiah and as Emmanuel.

**Adam:** Yeah, there's even this, I mean, we're not super high church, obviously. We even, even like the-

**Autumn:** What does that mean? We throw that term around sometimes. What does it mean that we're not “high church”?

**Adam:** I think, well, high church would be like our Sundays are marked by the liturgical calendar year, which, if you have never looked up the liturgical year, you can just Google that. And you can see kind of all the significant markers in the life of the Church that kind of help the Church in its orientation throughout the year to live into kind of various stories and

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kind of realities that mark our lives as Christians. So, one of these—we don't lean into this at all—but Christmastide is starts Christmas day, and then, I'm going to bungle this, this, again, not super high Church, but it's, there's an extended period of time, so many days where we're celebrating the birth of Christ, we're celebrating that Messiah has come.

And so, there's intentionality with some of these things that can help us kind of live. I think the argument for liturgy would be that we're living sort of more fully into the gift of the Savior that he has come, you know, like if I'm using Christmas tide as the example, but we are just kind of our faith tradition, not as kind of rigid in our structure. So, when we say we're not high Church, high Church would be this is the day that we do the thing. This is where it sits on the calendar, that therefore we do it. And it dictates so much of like how the Church is led and how the Church is shepherded and it informs like what is being taught and what are the songs being sung and all that.

**Autumn:** And the flow of actual services, so corporate spaces.

**Autumn:** Yeah. And so we would not probably- we would say we have an appreciation for some of that. We think it can be really helpful for our people.

**Autumn:** And it's historically significant.

**Adam:** Yes, the connection to our faith tradition and all of that is beautiful and powerful. I think for us, we've taken a little bit more of an approach where we want that stuff to inform, at times, how it is that we gather, but we also really have a high value on the work of the Spirit and discerning what it is that God has for us in a particular season, and not always just leaning on sort of a rigid structure to tell us. So, our Advent series this year is going to be called "Prepare Him Room." And it's not going to- not every aspect of it is going to fall into this sort of perfect liturgical box of what some other churches who are maybe what we would say more high Church or more traditional would try to do in this season.

**Autumn:** Yeah, that's helpful.

**Adam:** So, that's what I mean. So, I don't know, Anglicans would probably look at us and be like, you're low, low church, you know?

**Autumn:** And there's a variety of expressions within the Anglican Church too. Some are highly liturgical, and some a little bit less so.

**Adam:** That's right. There's a range with all these things. Yeah, there're definitely ranges. I think one of the sweet things about Advent in being future-oriented, it means that if we can stop here and pull back for a second and just sort of examine, you know, Advent within the context of all of our year or our life, we really start to see how significant as followers of Jesus the past is. We spent this whole year examining Exodus, right? We can also start to see how significant the present moment is. That was our series in Romans 8, "Life in the Spirit," was really about helping us as followers of Jesus live on mission, live out the Great Commission empowered by the Spirit. And so, it's like, how do we even just follow Jesus and live out life? We talk about the work of the Spirit, and what are the implications of all that, and what does it mean for us today. That's that sort of present moment. So, we've looked back at the past, we're talking about the present moment, and then now Advent is calling us into the future. So, I think for us and for Fellowship Denver people especially, this is kind of a really fun and beautiful way to wrap up the year. And if it's okay, I'd like to take a minute and read this excerpt from this book called *Calendar*. It's from Laurence Stookey—I think I'm saying that right.

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**Autumn:** That's what it looks like.

**Adam:** Yeah. But the reason I wanted to read this, just to kind of tee it up, is because he talks about how significant past, present, and future, we tend to think of these things as kind of boxes that sort of occupy space in our mind. And one of the assertions he makes in the book is that, we don't often really need to be convinced that the past has a really powerful shaping effect on who we are. But one of the arguments, or kind of the illustration here that he makes, is that I'm going to read is about how powerful the future can be to shape who we are today. And I think that's actually the invitation of Advent in a lot of ways to really see how powerful future orientation, the hope that is to come when Christ makes all things new. That has an incredible, incredible influence over us if we'll live into it. And so, here's kind of his example of the future having this shaping power. He says:

It may be less evident, however, that the future also shapes us in important ways. Theologians call this shaping power of the future 'eschatology,' literally the things at the end. But one need not be a theologian in order to have an eschatology. As I was growing up in mid America during the post-World War II years, a compelling eschatology had gripped the nation. There were ominous reports of the massive military power of the Soviet Union and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover and Senator Joseph McCarthy were finding fifth column communists in every crevasse. The possibility of a thermonuclear holocaust was discussed daily in the media. The future, in short, seemed to have the shape of a mushroom cloud. The effect upon the present was horrendous. Inordinate sums of money were spent on defense, air raid sirens installed in every community were tested periodically so that no one could ignore their presence or the impending doom they prefigured. School children were routinely put through civil defense drills, and yellow and black signs everywhere indicated the location of bomb shelters. The affluent built private bunkers in their yards and sometimes stocked them not only with food and water but with guns and ammunition to ensure that no one outside of the family would intrude in time of panic. As a preteen, I worried whether my little village in Illinois was far enough from St. Louis to escape devastation when the Russians would inevitably, it seemed, send their missiles hurling over the North Pole at a city that had a lively munitions industry and suppose their aim was bad and they hit my town directly. Not many called this view of things an eschatology, but that is precisely what it was. Life magazine photographs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki haunted us as the past conspired with the future to shape the present in terrifying ways. To live as if the present could be boxed off from the past and the future is unrealistic even for someone who has no concern for religious thinking. But for Christians rooted in biblical traditions, the task is doubly untenable. The Christian story reaches back to the Exodus of ancient Israel and before and stretches forward to the descent of the new heaven and new earth and beyond. Indeed, it can be said that Christians are called to assume a cruciform posture standing upright with feet firmly planted in the present. We stretch out one arm to grasp our heritage and the other arm to lay hold of our hope. Standing thus we assume the shape of our central symbol of faith, the cross. If either hand releases its grip, spiritual disaster threatens as the sign of the cross becomes misinformed.

So, I really love this. It's a really powerful illustration and it kind of does something for me where I kind of go like, oh, I am- that's right, I am shaped by the things I set my mind on that exist in sort of this kind of unknown future category. Yeah, I really love the power of that though.

**Autumn:** Yeah, that example that you read in the quote from Laurence Stookey's book is so powerful. It makes this idea come alive really vividly. I love metaphors and examples that do that for us. The terrifying reality of a nuclear war that was demonstrated through what happened, actually happened, in Nagasaki and Hiroshima was what was set forward as

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a potential vision of the future, and then he was living in a time period drastically affected by both what had happened, the reality of what had happened, the potential threat what might happen, and that impacted so much of life during that post-World War II time period as he describes. That's such a such an amazing way to think about how this can happen but in a positive way when we live out of the reality of Christ's first coming and look forward to the future hope.

**Adam:** Yeah, the picture he paints is fairly bleak.

**Autumn:** Yeah, it's a negative example, but it really demonstrates that the confluence of both and how they shape us.

**Adam:** Yeah, well I think there's a weight to his story that really does kind of help anchor and kind of, you know, with a lot of sobriety help us see the future is really really powerful. And I think oftentimes it can feel as though the thought of Christ making all things new, it can just be really hard to wrap your brain around the significance of that and the power of that.

**Autumn:** And there is still so much we have this- as Christians, we look forward to this future hope, but there is still so much of the future in a very physical material sense that we just don't know, so we have this ultimate hope, this eschatological hope that we look towards. And yet a lot of the future is still unknown to us. What we do know is the present, and we know the reality to some extent of the past, and so I think that our ability—you mentioned this before, you read that quote—our ability to see how the past has shaped us and has shaped the present is fairly accurate. It's tangible. We feel like we can hang on to that. It's clear. But the reality of how the future is also shaping us is sometimes not as clear, and Advent actually asks us to engage that how that future hope is currently shaping us.

**Adam:** Yeah, and I think there's a there's a nice invitation here as well which is to slow down. I think for us to properly consider the future oftentimes we really have to be willing to slow our minds. To slow our thoughts, to remove distraction I think this is one of the sweet invitations of this season. You know, my wife and I were talking about planning 2024, setting goals, and all that you know. That's looking at the future, right? But in order to do any of that stuff, we actually have to carve out space and time. We have to remove distraction. We have to allow ourselves to kind of be untethered to the things that sort of make up our weeks and fill our minds. And so, I think along with future orientation, there is this opportunity to really be present in the season to hear from the Lord and to try to remove distraction that I think is such a gift of the season. I mean, I don't know about you, but the season always feels crazy. I get to December and have no available days to do anything. So you really have to work extra hard at it, but I'm so thankful that the Advent season is calling me into this because it's had a time when I really need it most.

**Autumn:** Well, that's a great segue into my next question. This next aspect of Advent, and that's actually experiencing Advent and entering into the season. So if during Advent what we're attempting to do or hoping to do, if the season of Advent asks us to hold on to the reality of the past, so to look back to the first coming of Christ and to hold on to the reality of the future hope that we have in Christ and looking towards His second coming, so we acknowledge that the reality of the past and the potential of the future meet during the season of Advent. They experience this. They come together. So there's this point of conjunction or confluence, and we are living here in the present that is being shaped by both or hanging on to both and intentionally looking forward and looking back, then the question is, you just mentioned one way, but how do we do that? How do we enter into the season and actually engage that, and you just gave us a great example of carving out some time, setting aside some intentional time, whether for yourself with your family, but also then corporately I think with our church family, that's a part of carving out time to really experience Advent, to live in the

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reality of the present that is affected by and being shaped by the past and the future. But what other ways would you encourage us to engage this season and enter into the hope that we have?

**Adam:** Yeah, I mean, I think this is the big reveal of the podcast; we're going to talk about songs. Yeah, I'm the worship pastor at the church, and I'm on a podcast about Advent, and I'm going to turn us towards some music.

**Autumn:** Yeah, we're continuing like the last few times you've been on the podcast, you talk about, in some way, about worship, about singing, about corporate worship. So, let's just keep it going.

**Adam:** I think, if that's okay, that's where I'd like to take this conversation. No, I really think, obviously I'm pastor at the church, my one of my primary responsibilities is to help us put our services together. And so, for me this is the opportunity that I have to help our people engage in the season is to just go, what's the thing that we're going to be doing every week? We're going to be gathering, we're going to be worshipping, so how can we use that space in that time to create real invitation for people? You know, oftentimes this is one of the sort of few moments people have in their weeks where they can actually slow down and they can sit under the Word and they can lift their voice in song and then worship and praise. So it's significant for our ministry, significant for me to think through with some intentionality, what is it we're trying to lead people into? And especially these first two weeks of Advent, we do a couple things on purpose well. One, we try to orient our people towards Christ coming again, and we intentionally hold off on singing the more celebratory songs of Christ's birth. So, we'll sing songs like "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," and "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus." In fact, we're singing both of those on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, and we will repeat those on December 10<sup>th</sup>. That is the second Sunday. And so, that's kind of one. And that's kind of the big way that we try to come alongside our people and really help them lean into this season. And so, there might be, for folks, not a lot of thought given to how it is that we order our services or how we think through them, whatever. All that's fine.

**Autumn:** But you spend a lot of time thinking about that.

**Adam:** We think about it. And I think one of the temptations of the season can be that when you get into, especially December, it's like, let's play all these amazing, beautiful, classic Christmas songs that for so many of us hold so much significance, not just because the words are powerful and the melodies are beautiful, but because we've been singing them for generations. And so, they connect back to our story, maybe our story of faith or our story of origin or sweet times growing up in the Church or whatever. But we try to resist that initially. So, we're not going to sing "Joy to the World" this Sunday. And we're not even actually going to sing all sorts of Advent or Christmas songs fully in the first- we try to sing Advent songs, but we're not going to sing Christmas songs in the first couple of weeks of December. And all of that is intentional. We're trying to help people slow down and orient us with songs of longing, songs that really have a tone of desperation in them, even a tone of a little bit of sadness or grief. And so, that's kind of where we start.

**Autumn:** Based on what you referenced in our conversation a moment ago, it sounds like you are leading us, leading our church family, Adam, you and then the worship team with you, the band with you, leading our church family into this historic, the pattern that you referenced earlier, this historic observation of Advent in the first couple of weeks that builds toward the birth of Christ. But those first two weeks of Advent, you mentioned traditionally in the liturgical sense and observation have this future orientation. And so, through the songs that we're singing together, you're inviting people into that sort of mindset and pressing us into a season of preparation that looks to Christ's second coming. Is that accurate? That the reason that you select songs like that for the first couple of weeks of Advent?

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**Adam:** Yeah, I think it's really trying to- I'm really struck by this idea of orientation. So, you know, Advent really, if it is this season where we're future-oriented, then how do we find songs that speak to the hope of Israel, the hope of God's people, where in the words of the songs there's literally- they're writing these songs out and saying, we are hopeful that one day this will come, this will happen. And so, I think for me, it's really more around that idea. I think we're, here at the end, we're going to examine the lyrics, so we'll get into some of these songs a little bit. You know, the songs that we choose are filled with longing, and yet they're also filled with Jesus. And so, we do live in this reality that Jesus has come. And so, we don't sing songs that totally ignore the fact like we're not in the wilderness, you know, entirely. So I think that's kind of where my brain goes. And I think too one of the things that's worth mentioning, if you're trying to sort of peel back the layers of this or look behind the curtain, I mean, that is only going to make up some of our songs. And then we have other songs that kind of speak maybe more directly to the sermon. And this is part of our low churchiness, I guess you could say. But we're trying to do a few things here at once. And so, we're going to have songs that are filled with longing, future oriented. And then we're also going to have songs that build off of the themes of the sermon. And so, I just want to acknowledge that there're a few things going on here. So, it's not a clear through line. It's not like, you know, we start here, songs of longing, that's all we sing, we don't do any other kinds of songs, and then we build towards this joyous celebration on Christmas Eve or whatever. For what it's worth, I just wanted to kind of tag that.

**Autumn:** It is interesting that these songs that you mentioned are multi-layered in that they have this future hope, but it is also the additional layer there is that we are entering into the same mindset, the same orientation, the same hope in terms of waiting and longing that is depicted for us through passages like Psalm 130 that you mentioned before, through passages like Isaiah 9, in that all of Israel, the people of God, we're looking to this future hope, and we also are looking to a future hope. And so, it is multi-layered in that there is a historic significance to the eschatological perspective. And that is woven into the language that's used in these songs that we sing during this time of Advent.

**Adam:** Yeah, I think it's one of the gifts of the season is we connect ourselves to the story of God's people, you know. And so, they had particular longings, particular hopes, desires for forgiveness, desires for redemption. We also still have those today. And so, it really is in that way, it anchors us, it roots us in the story of God's people. And I think it's really helpful to just know we are not alone as a people. I think often we can feel isolated in our walk with the Lord. And so, I really love that piece of the season. We really sing- some of these songs are kind of written from the perspective of Israel, you know. So, they're rooted in this kind of historical perspective.

**Autumn:** As we walk through Advent and experience this sense of waiting and longing and building anticipation for the birth of Christ, we remind ourselves that the longing and the waiting that we're expressing during that first part of Advent is still anchored in the reality of Jesus coming as a baby. So, this is the *already, but not yet*, reality and the past reality and the future hope again meeting during the season of Advent. And so, this subtle shift that we begin to experience corporately as a church family in the second half of Advent and singing more songs like "Joy to the World" or like "Silent Night" really anchor in the birth of Christ.

**Adam:** Yeah, that's right.

**Autumn:** We look towards the reality of our future through the lens of these promises. And we remember that God fulfilled those promises in the person of Jesus, fulfilled many of these promises in the person of Jesus, and the promises that have yet to be fulfilled will once again be fulfilled through the person of Jesus in a future reality.

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**Adam:** Yeah, and I think, you know, for us kind of getting again sort of down into the weeds on this a little bit, but when we're selecting these songs and we're thinking through, what are the songs that we're going to sing? you know, we might hold off "Joy to the World" this year, we might hold that off until Christmas Eve, you know, and it might be one of the last songs we sing. But there are going to be other songs of celebration that we will sing before Christmas Eve that third Sunday. And part of it is trying to bring people along, but understanding that this is also a season filled with lots of travel. People are not here every Sunday. We still desire to try to lead people into the season and lead people along. So, you know, there are four weeks, but it is not this linear thing all the way. The first two weeks are kind of lumped together, and the last two are kind of lumped together at least as I think of them in terms of broad stroke. And so, my heart there is that if you're able to be in the building and if you're able to attend service and maybe you can only go to two of the four or three of the four or whatever the case may be, that we're just trying our best to kind of come alongside folks and not withhold real joy and real celebration because somebody's going to be gone Christmas Eve or whatever. So, there are parts of this and pieces of this where we know that Sunday morning can't totally just do everything for everyone. But if we can give these bite-sized kind of chunks, then we're able to come alongside people. So, third and fourth Sunday, we are singing, you know, "O Come, All Ye Faithful," we are singing "Silent Night," we're singing some of these more celebratory songs that help us kind of live into proclaiming and giving praise to God through the birth of Jesus.

**Autumn:** Last week on the podcast, Andy and I asked together, how do we prepare our hearts? So, how do we prepare our hearts for the coming of Jesus? And this week, you and I are asking, how do we enter into the season of Advent? And, how do we see ourselves as situated within the story of God's people? And the answer that you and I are really giving today is so much of this is through the music of the season. I think it's so interesting that Christmas as a cultural celebration is characterized in a pretty distinct way by the music that accompanies Christmas. And we all experience the Christmas season in the United States through the music of the season. And within the Church, similarly, there is music that accompanies the Advent season. And a part of the way we experience Advent is through the music of the Advent. And so, I love thinking through this with you, Adam, and hearing that explanation of how we construct our services, what our hope is when people come to our corporate gatherings. There are ways that you can do this at home to put together a playlist. Sometimes something you do on behalf of our church family is that you actually put together a playlist and then share it. So, I don't know if you're intending to do that—I'm not trying to put you on the hook for something here.

**Adam:** Yeah, that should be really fun.

**Autumn:** But you've done that in the past, and I think that's such a sweet way to celebrate certain seasons together as our church family, but both in our corporate spaces. And then just throughout the week, you can listen to the music of Advent. And that helps you engage this season and actually does part of the work of preparation during the season of Advent. As you listen to the lyrics of the songs that are characteristic of the Advent season and that really embody the waiting and longing and then the celebration that we as a church family enter into during Advent. So, let's just round out today by talking about a couple of those songs that we sing and why the lyrics are so powerful and what they encourage in us as we sing them together.

**Adam:** Yeah, I love that. It is such a funny time of year. It's like, I mean, I don't know anyone that doesn't have an opinion on when it's appropriate to start listening to Christmas music.

**Autumn:** Totally. Anyways, yeah, we can move into these songs. But I just, it's so funny, this the power of music in this time of year. Let's look at "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."



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**Adam:** This is a song that was written I think—it might be a little off here—I think it's a million years ago. Something like that. No, it was written, I think, eighth, ninth century. And then it was translated in the 1800s into kind of how we know and understand the song today and how we experience it. So, it's a song that's been around for a really long time. So I'll just read the lyrics. We can talk about it.

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.

So, you know, kind of just starting off, we're really invited to consider the story of God's people. And even this idea, the line, "That mourns in lonely exile here," I think it's, for many of us, it's probably not too much work to personalize a line like that. And so, there's a real invitation here to kind of be okay to, sit in some space of grief or some space of loneliness, and just to have our story be connected with the story of God's people. It's so quick, you can almost skip right over it. But I think there is such a simple, sweet invitation here in those lines. And then-

**Autumn:** It's interesting, the line that just proceeds that says "ransom captive Israel," but obviously in the ninth century, even though that was a million years ago.

**Adam:** Yes, a million. That's right.

**Autumn:** Israel, the Old Testament, the whole era of the Old Testament was already passed by the point at which this song was written. And so, the words of this song, the lyrics of the song are really doing what we mentioned a moment ago. They're seeing the present state of God's people through the lens of the reality of the story of Israel, which is something that our Church did together in our Exodus series. We looked at how the story of Exodus helps us actually understand our life with God in the present. And so, this song is doing much the same, even though it's referring to something that happened in the past as being in the present, ransom captive Israel. Israel was not actually captive at that point in the Old Testament sense of captivity, but they're replacing the current people of God within the story of the Old Testament such that we experience the same sort of longing for restoration and hope in the way that the ancient Israelites would have.

**Adam:** Yeah. Well, and I think one of the sweet things about this song, the refrain is actually- this song kind of takes this sort of major sounding melodic kind of shift where it's pretty celebratory. So, it's "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, shall come to thee O Israel." And so, there is this piece of it where we live this side of the cross. Jesus has come, He has offered redemption to His people and He's offered forgiveness and salvation. And so, we get to kind of sing it through the lens of God's people, through the lens of Israel longing for Messiah and yet knowing that Messiah has come. And so, it's sort of both, we get to do both things in this song, which I think is really helpful for us to have the reminder to live in the reality that we can rejoice. The words "rejoice" here for us are a command that we can live into with confidence.

**Autumn:** Yeah, this song is filled with so much beautiful language, and we won't take time to break down all of it today, but I'll read a little more of it. And for those of you listening, just look it up and read through the words and meditate on them. If you have a moment this week during Advent, it's an amazing exercise that connects us not only into the story of God's people, but to the story of the Church. That's what I love about singing these old songs during Advent, too, is that

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it brings us into this frame of mind of participating in a season that God's people have participated in year after year for millions of years.

So, this song was written, but some of the lyrics later in the song say, and recapture kind of this sense of mourning and sadness that you already brought out, Adam, it says:

O come, O Bright and Morning Star,  
and bring us comfort from afar!  
Dispel the shadows of the night  
and turn our darkness into light.

And then the last verse says:

O come, desire of nations bind,  
in one the hearts of all mankind,  
bid all our sad divisions cease  
and be thyself our King of peace.

And so, one aspect of this particular song that I love is that it starts with the story of God's people, calls to mind Israel in the Old Testament in captivity, and the refrain, the chorus, reminds us that we can rejoice because of the reality of God with us, Emmanuel. And then through the song, it works through actually prophetic language. So, it uses the term in an intermediate verse there, "branch of Jesse." And so it references Israel, the prophets, and then really brings us into our reality in the present as the people of God now in this last verse, "Come, desire of nations bind, in one the hearts of all mankind, bid all our sad divisions cease, and be thyself our king of peace." And that is new creation language. And that's what we as the Church now look forward to.

**Adam:** That's right. Desire of nations speaks to that. And then the line "King of peace" there at the end just speaks to the peace that Christ will bring. And so, it really sort of helps us kind of bookend, you know, the song with this future orientation towards Christ.

**Autumn:** I think you had queued up "Come the Long Expected Jesus" also. Should we talk about that one?

**Adam:** Yeah. I wanted to talk about both these songs because they kind of do very similar things. There is this acknowledgement of restoration, longing, future hope, and at the end of the day, Jesus uses the name Jesus in the song. And so, it's talking specifically about what Christ does for us. And so, we can kind of get into that. But at the same time, the languages, I mean, the melody and the lyrics of the song are still this very kind of introspective almost kind of sad song. And so, yeah, this one starts off, it says:

Come, thou long expected Jesus,  
born to set thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us,  
let us find our rest in thee.

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So, kind of out the gate there is this mention of Jesus, and I always find it, I don't know, maybe just my perspective on the song, but it's like, man, I wish Jesus would come and set us free. And yet we know He has. And so, it's just kind of an interesting; we're communicating two distinct thoughts here about Jesus, longing for freedom, also in our minds knowing that He's already done it. And so, it's a real invitation to enter into the story of God's people. And then I love this line, "let us find our rest in thee." Here again there's just an invitation to be restored, to be renewed in Christ, to slow down, to find rest, to rest in the completed work that He is, He has accomplished on our behalf. So, for me, really important in this season to give this song space in our Sunday services. The next verse is:

Israel's strength and consolation,  
hope of all the earth thou art;  
dear desire of every nation,  
joy of every longing heart.

So, just building on similar themes, but really lovely poetry. And so, I think it's incredibly fitting for us to sing. So, then the following verse says:

Born thy people to deliver,  
born a child and yet a King,  
born to reign in us forever,  
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

So, this sermon series of "Prepare Him Room" that we're going to be doing for Advent is speaking to some of these things that we see here in this song, this idea that "born to reign in us forever," this idea that we are making the space in our heart for Jesus in the season. And then the last verse says:

By thine own eternal spirit  
rule in all our hearts alone;

So, these themes are just woven into this song and really woven into this season. So, I'm actually excited to sing this in light of where we're going to be going in this sermon series.

**Autumn:** These songs and many of the songs that we sing during Advent are really poignant example of how to enter into the season of Advent. They give us an example of the way that these authors actually did, that they were processing the reality of Jesus birth, the reality of His coming kingdom and Him, Christ as King. And so, these songs give us language to live out of this past reality and to look towards a future hope with longing to actually do the work, engage in the work, of preparing our hearts. So, I think it's such a wonderful way to answer this. How do we enter into the season? Well, one way is clearly through engaging the music of Advent, singing these songs together in our gathered spaces and then listening to them and singing along with them really just anytime in your car, with your kids, at home during the season of Advent. And I think, Adam, I think you promised us a Gregorian chant to close out our episode today.

**Adam:** Yeah, I put a little something together here. No, that's not true.

**Autumn:** But thank you. Thank you for joining me on the podcast today, and thanks for the work that you do to help our church engage Advent well. We appreciate it.

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**Adam:** Yeah, I'm excited to sing. This is always one of my favorite seasons. And so, it's a joy to sing with our Church and to lead us in these songs. And I think if you're- I would just give an encouragement to say, if you're feeling a little detached from the season, one of the opportunities you have is to really lean in and to really lift your voice when these songs are being sung. It's going to maybe even feel hard or it can feel a little strange, but I think it is the sort of wonderful power of music, the gift of music that God's given in the Church. So, lean in, lift your voice. But thanks for having me.

**Autumn:** If you, those of you listening have questions about today's episode or suggestions about what you'd like to hear us discuss on the podcast in the future, send all of that anytime to [podcast@fellowshipdenver.org](mailto:podcast@fellowshipdenver.org). Thanks for joining us on the Vision for Life podcast. Special thanks to Adam Anglin for our theme music, to Jesse Cowan, our producer, and to Judd Connell, who provides transcription for these episodes.