



~ Week Two ~

“O Come, All Ye Faithful”

Check-in

How are you? Where have you seen Christ working in your life in the last week? And... let's start the debate. What constitutes a Christmas “Carol”? Is it limited to songs you'd find in an old church hymnal, like Silent Night or The First Noel? Do modern songs like “Light of the World” by Lauren Daigle qualify? And what about “White Christmas” or “Rudolph”? Are they “carols” or just Christmas songs? Ready, go!

Opening Prayer

Ever-present and Loving God,
forgive us when we give you the back seat.

Introduction

Regardless of your definition, the song we're going to look at today is undoubtedly a carol. And like the others in this series, will help us

prepare our hearts for Christmas. Remember, this season of Advent, (the four weeks leading up to Christmas,) is a time to celebrate a God who did not remain distant but came into our world to show us how much we are loved. And the timeless songs of this season offer us beautiful insight into the stories in the Bible that tell us of Jesus's birth. So, these carols, as much as the Scriptures they reflect, can help us re-embrace Christ entering into our world and into our lives.

Warm-up Question: last week, we were challenged to listen to songs with the intent of paying attention to the lyrics and letting them soak into our hearts and minds, to help us prepare for Christmas. What have you listened to in the last week that has helped you in this way? Did you encounter a song that, once you started really listening to the lyrics, maybe wasn't as helpful as you maybe previously thought?

Scripture & Carol

Last week, we began with a carol that harkened back to prophecies about the birth of Christ from 750 years before he was born, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." And for us, this song was not a plea for Christ to come to Israel to free them from captivity, but a plea for us, for Christ to enter into our lives and free us from the things that bind us and to welcome us home when we feel exiled. And the result was the chorus, that we could "Rejoice! Rejoice!" because "Emmanuel had come to us." Today, we take a look at what a song serves as a response to the carol we sang last week, and one that, maybe more than many others, can help us prepare our hearts for Christmas.

-O Come, All Ye Faithful

(If you're working through this Reflection Guide in a group, like last week, vote on the best singer, and that person has to sing the first verse and refrain. No backing out! If no one will sing it, have someone read the first verse and chorus.) For some, this might be an unfamiliar hymn. But to many of us, this is a carol we've sung year after year after year, or heard played on the radio or Spotify, recorded by a plethora of artists from Nat King Cole to Carrie Underwood, Toby Mac and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, not to mention a reggae version done by Pentatonix with over 55 million views on YouTube. So, it's super popular and one that many of you have memorized. But here's the problem with that... when you know something that well, you usually stop paying attention to the words. You sing it or listen to it. It's pretty. Pentatonix puts sick harmonies over a wicked beatbox, and you get lost in it. But do we really know the words we're saying? See, the words of this carol are powerful... and more than that, they're convicting. Last week's carol was a plea for Christ to come into our lives, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." This week, "O Come, All Ye Faithful," is *our response*.

Question 1: Just hearing the first verse and chorus, discuss these lyrics. What do they mean to you? (Assuming you hadn't heard Pastor Mike's reflection on Sunday,) how would they impact you? Are they just a celebration? Or are they a call to action?

To help us understand this carol, we need to look at where it came from. Now, the first verse and chorus could reflect any number of stories from the birth of Christ. But read the second verse. (If you're in a group, have someone sing it. Be bold!) This is a scene taken straight from Luke's version of Jesus life, and a story about some shepherds.

Read Luke, chapter 2, verses 6 through 18.

The shepherds were just hanging out in their fields. When suddenly, choirs of angels were singing. You might say they were, "singing in exultation." (See where the lyrics come from?) And then, one angel says to them, (paraphrased for our carol today,) "Okay, All Ye Faithful, go find the baby Jesus... your Messiah, your Emmanuel, your Deliverer... go adore, your Christ, the Lord."

Question 1: If you've seen "A Charlie Brown Christmas," then you're probably familiar with this Scripture and Linus's famous "that's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown" speech. But take a deeper dive into the verses. What stands out? What would you have done had you been a shepherd? Would you have hurried off to find Jesus or would you have gone back to bed, chalking the event up to a bad-eggnog-induced hallucination?

Reflection

Last week, we re-embraced Christ coming into the world and into our lives with a plea to God. This week's carol is God's response. We sang, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." God replies, "Okay, well... O Come,

All Ye Faithful.” When we ask Christ to come into our lives, something we are reminded of and celebrate every year at Christmas, we are then required to live differently. We are then required to do something about it. When Christ comes into our lives, we are required to respond. And what is that response? It’s the chorus of our song. (Just for fun, sing it as a group.) “O Come let us *adore* him.” But “adore” isn’t a word we use much. So, what does it mean for us to adore Christ, the Lord? What is adoration? Well, that comes from the Scripture we just read...

**¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph,
and the baby, who was lying in the manger. (Luke 2:16 NIV)**

If we are to *adore* Christ the Lord this Christmas, it means doing what the shepherds did. Their response was, (and thus our response should be,) two-fold. First, they “hurried off.” They left their sheep and their jobs behind. They broke from their normal, everyday pace, even if just for a little while. So, the first step in adoration, in adoring Christ the Lord, is to take a break from our schedules, to leave the job and the sheep and the workplace behind for a bit. (Don’t quit your job... just... take a managerial-sanctioned break.) If you’re serious about using Advent and Christmas for what they were intended, (that is, to remind us of Christ coming into our lives,) the first step is to do what the shepherds did, and take a break from the business and stress and chaos and make time for *him*. Christ came into this world to be with you, Emmanuel, God with us. Our response, the very least we should do, is to carve out time in our schedules to devote to him.

But what do we do with that time? Well, it's the second half of verse 16. They hurried off and "found Joseph and Mary, and the baby, lying in the manger." They went to find the Messiah. The shepherds didn't just leave the sheep and get a coffee at the Bethlehem Starbucks. They *sought out* Jesus Christ, and so should we. Seek Christ through prayer and meditation. Seek Christ through reading the story of Jesus's birth in the Bible. Seek Christ this Christmas through singing praises to him. You still have time between now and Christmas... use it for adoration, breaking from your schedule to seek out Christ.

Question 3: Do you have any rituals or routines already in place that you might now classify as "adoration"? A pre-bedtime routine of opening an Advent calendar or a flip book of Scriptures? What prevents you from creating space in your schedule for adoration?

Closing

So, what do we mean when we sing "O Come let us adore him"? It means we do what the shepherds did. We set aside our busy-ness, our chaos, our worry, our stress... and make the time to seek out our Messiah. And then, we use that time to *adore* him, through spending time with him, through prayer and scripture and praise. That's adoration. So your challenge, for the days remaining until Christmas is to live this out. Take 15 minutes and use it to read a passage from one of the chapters about Jesus's birth in the Bible, spend a few minutes in prayer and meditation, and then closing with a carol. (Just not Jingle Bells.) That's adoration. And the result? You will find this Christmas

season to be so much more meaningful. We invited Christ to come into our lives with, “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”. Well, guess what, he did... and now it’s our turn to respond... to be “All Ye Faithful.” This week, make the time to adore him, and in doing so, prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ. “O Come let us adore him, Christ the Lord.”

Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations.

Close in prayer.