

Christmas Carols - Part 1

O Come, O Come
Emmanuel

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Part of Christmas at Gateway 2022 Christmas Carols

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“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is perhaps the oldest Christmas carol still in use, based on ancient antiphons - short sentences or phrases sung after the reading of a Psalm or other biblical text.

The antiphons, and now, stanzas, each point to a major theme of prophecy about the Messiah.

Each verse is, in effect, a prayer to Jesus, the Messiah, based on various prophetic names, to rescue the singers from their “lonely exile.”

Original Order of Great O Antiphons - Latin (English):

- Sapientia (*O Wisdom*)
- Adonai (*O Lord*)
- Radix Jesse (*O Root [or Rod] of Jesse*)

- **Clavis David** (*O Key of David*)
- **Oriens** (*O Dayspring*)
- **Rex Gentium** (*O King of the Nations*)
- **Emmanuel** (*O With Us is God*)

Verse 1

***O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.***

The word “Emmanuel” here initially comes from a prophecy of Isaiah about the Messiah.

This may be the greatest promise of all these verses, because it promises, as does each refrain, that God is with us.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

—Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).

—Matthew 1:23 (ESV)

This song reminds us to call out to God, our “Emmanuel,” “God with us,” in times of trouble as a reminder to us that God is with us and on our side.

Refrain

***Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.***

And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and

sighing shall flee away.

—Isaiah 35:10 (ESV)

And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.”

—Luke 2:10-12 (ESV)

The Refrain is affirming the great joy to come that can even be claimed now, as the song was sung, for God’s promises can be trusted that God would never leave nor forsake His people, whether Israel then or His church today!

Verse 2

***O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan’s tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save,
And give them victory o’er the grave.***

The “Rod” or “Root” or “shoot” of Jesse pointed to an offspring of Jesse, the father of David, and therefore of David himself, the idealized King of God’s people.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

—Isaiah 11:1-2 (ESV)

This carol reminds us that our real slavery is brought on by fears of sin and death.

how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power. He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with

him.

—Acts 10:38 (ESV)

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

—Hebrews 2:14-15 (ESV)

We can rejoice because the “Rod of Jesse,” Jesus the Messiah, came to free us from sin and the power of the devil.

Verse 3

***O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death’s dark shadows put to flight.***

The term “Dayspring” points to the rising sun and the coming of light into a dark world.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

—Isaiah 9:2 (ESV)

The coming Messiah would bring light into the present dark world, illuminating evil and showing the way forward through his light.

Zechariah (father of John the Baptist): *“And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of*

death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

—Luke 1:76-79 (ESV)

Jesus: ... *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”*

—John 8:12 (ESV)

Verse 4

***O come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav’nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.***

LORD God of Hosts: *“And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.”*

—Isaiah 22:22 (ESV)

Jesus: *“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: ‘The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens.’”*

—Revelation 3:7 (ESV)

Jesus says he possesses the “key of David,” indicating that he rules over the people of God, Israel, and now the church, to open the way to eternity with him, and what he opens remains open and what he closes remains shut.

Jesus: ... *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

—John 14:6 (ESV)

Verse 5

***O come, Adonai, Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai’s height,
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.***

“Adonai” is a title for God that means “Lord,” meaning the Messiah is our total, complete Master, possessing all power and might, able to accomplish whatever He wills.

Levites: “You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you.”

—Nehemiah 9:6 (ESV)

The LORD reigns; he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed; he has put on strength as his belt. Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting.

—Psalms 93:1-2 (ESV)

The Lord Jesus reigns now and forever, and we are encouraged to live that truth now.

Verse 6

***O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things, far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And cause us in her ways to go.***

God is often referred to as “Wisdom” embodied - that He is the essence of not just knowledge but wisdom for what is best in life.

“It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.”

—Jeremiah 51:15 (ESV)

Because the Messiah is God in the flesh, He, too, represents pure “wisdom,” so that his ways and will are always, by their very nature, best for each and every one of His creations, for us!

but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

—1 Corinthians 1:24 (ESV)

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

—Proverbs 3:5-6 (ESV)

Verse 7

***O come, Desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife and quarrels cease;
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.***

“Desire of nations” refers to the Messiah as what all nations and people will ultimately want and desire, for in Christ we are all one, having the same “heart and mind” as Christ.

“I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,” says the LORD Almighty.

—Haggai 2:7 (NIV)

so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

—Philippians 2:10-11 (ESV)

This unity brought about by the “Desire of nations” will lead to there being true peace not just among all people but within each person.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

—Luke 2:13-14 (ESV)

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 8:31-39 (ESV)

Next Week - We Three Kings of Orient Are