

Isaiah 9:2-7; Matthew 1:18-23
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
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12-2-18

Once again, good morning, and especially to you who may be here as a visitor or family and friends of these three great young guys. It's hard to believe that it is already December and that Christmas is just around the corner. In these next three weeks as we prepare for the arrival of Jesus, the hope of Christmas, I want to invite you to do something with me. Would you join me in praying for people in our lives that you may know, who need, more than anything, to hear about the hope of Jesus? And would you join me in praying that on Christmas Eve, this room would be filled to overflowing with people we've invited to share with us in the hope and joy of Christmas?

Well this morning we begin a new series of sermons I've entitled Carols, because there is nothing quite so quintessentially Christmas as groups of people getting together to sing. The music that surrounds Christmas is some of the best music there is, of course with one exception—Santa Baby. Not our best effort.

But if you think about it, what a strange thing it is for people to get together for the purpose of, among other things, singing together? There are few other times in our lives when we publicly sing together: take me out to the ball game, that song we sing at new years that I still can't pronounce, or having happy birthday sung to you at a restaurant. Did you know there are two types of people in the world, those who like having the happy birthday song sung to them, and those who hate those who like having the happy birthday song sung to them.

But it was just as strange and other worldly for the Shepherds out in the fields, when the angels burst on the scene with heavenly choirs. Singing is a little strange, but it is actually a very healthy and natural thing for us to do.

I was reading an article this week on Brain Imaging, yeah I don't know what that is either. But it talks about how when groups of people sing together it has been scientifically proven to lower stress, reduce anxiety, and release endorphins into our brains that make us smarter, healthier, happier, and more creative. Which means that not singing makes you dumber, sicker, and generally grumpier in life. So, we should all want to sing, it's almost as if we were built to sing.

There's no better time of year to get in on this than the Christmas Singing. Real quick, turn to the people sitting next to you and tell them what your favorite Christmas Carol is, ready, set, go.

During this season of Advent leading up to Christmas each week we are going to take one Christmas Carol and hold it up next to Scripture and see how it's timeless message points us to the hope of the manger.

Today we're looking at a song that has its roots all the way back to the 9th Century, O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

You know one of the truths that becomes evident to us, especially during this season of Advent and Christmas is the paradox of life that we can experience deep sadness and difficulty when others are

celebrating and things are good in the world. Likewise, when the world appears as though it's teetering on the edge, we can experience what seems like inexplicable joy and peace. That's because all of life is spent moving between these two poles of exuberant joy and plaintive longing.

Life can feel somewhat artificial if we only ever allow the shiny happy messages of joy and glee fill our lives. We are confronted every day by the sad reminder that the world waits with groaning for the son of God to appear, and if you pay even a millisecond of attention to the news right now, you know what I mean. And yet even in these, there are also moments when God's Kingdom and genuine peace and joy pierce the darkness.

And if this paradox, this tension of life between the poles makes sense to you, then O Come Emmanuel may be the song for you. Look with me at the words from some of the verses from this dark and hauntingly beautiful song with me.

O Come O Come Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel. This was a call that a prophet by the name of Isaiah in the 8th century BC as foreign nations and invaders bore down on this vulnerable people. In Isaiah 7 Isaiah announces the name of Immanuel, a name that suggests, that as the assaults upon them rage, God will be with them and will pay the ransom only God in human flesh can pay.

O Come thou branch of Jesse's stem, unto thine own and rescue them. As the Assyrians invaded Judah, destroying what was left of King David (the youngest son of Jesse's) reign, Isaiah prophesied in chapter 11 that there would come a shoot out of that stump, a branch from its roots that would bear fruit.

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. Isaiah 11:1

Springing from a place of death, another from the line of Jesse, the son of Joseph, Jesus of Nazareth would free his people through death and resurrection, from Satan's tyranny, and make them alive to God forever.

O Come O Key of David come and open wide our heavenly home.

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

Emmanuel will rescue us from hell, and lock the door behind us. He will unlock the door of heaven, and bring us home to himself.

O Come O Come bright morning star, and bring us comfort from afar. Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.

And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare the ways, to give knowledge, forgive 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 the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace. Luke 1:76-79

Finally, O come, desire of nations, bind all peoples in one heart and mind. Bid all our sad divisions cease and be thyself our king of peace.

Jesus will draw the ransomed from every nation into a kingdom of peace. The prophet Haggai says: **And I will shake all nations, so that the treasures of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. Haggai 2:7**

This is who Jesus is, this is what he says he will do and what he has already done. But as you listen to and sing this dark and hauntingly beautiful song you'll notice that the verse express the deep yearnings and sometimes sad acknowledgements of how we live in the already-not yet of time in between the first and second coming of the Christ. But then at the end of each verse, the refrain bursts forth with triumphal hope reminding us of what is to come.

Rejoice, rejoice Emmanuel, shall come to thee O Israel.

Musically, the song's rhythm of plaintive longing in the verses, punctuated with powerful bursts of joy in the refrain, are a beautiful expression of our reality. It's here, but not yet. These verse/chorus exchanges capture the mystery and wonder of Christian life. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Already. But not yet. Fulfillment of glorious promises — yes! But consummation in the new earth with new bodies and no sin — not yet. We are left confident, but still crying out: "O come, O come, Emmanuel."

This time of year it is easy for us to get caught up in not only the struggles of our world, but as we go about trying to create a holiday for our families that is meaningful and warm, we can miss the true meaning of the season. And like the refrain "Rejoice" every once and a while the Kingdom unexpectedly shows up and all of life stops in what can only be described as a foretaste of the new Jerusalem.

I wonder if you saw this a few years ago, a random act of culture that took place at Macy's in Philadelphia? Take a look...

4 minutes in the middle of the hoards of shoppers, focused only on their holiday needs, and perhaps just hoping to give their family something nice for Christmas. Music, singing breaks forth announcing that a King and Kingdom is coming, so watch out. It's here, but not yet.

There's another event that stands in our lives as a central refrain, breaking forth from the hustle and bustle, resounding in the lives of those who mourn and struggle and long, reminding us that the Kingly reign of Jesus is here, but not yet. It's this meal we share together around this table in which our Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed took bread...