

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Text: Isaiah 7.14; Matthew 1.21–23

Theme: We join hands and voices with the church through the ages as they teach us how to rejoice at Christ's coming

Introduction — Hymn story of O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

- this is one of better known Christmas hymns
- we sing it every year, sometimes more than one time during our Advent recognition
- when it was first written is up for some debate
- some say in Middle Ages, perhaps around AD 800
- others say a couple hundred years later
- no matter, but we do know it was put into more of a verse hymn form around AD 1100
- in 1710, it was published in Latin hymnal
- it didn't receive much recognition until John Mason Neale, Anglican minister, discovered it
- translated from Latin & published it in 1851
- it then gained more popularity and has been sung often since that time

What's obvious is this song is clearly about Christ's coming as baby

- what makes it stand out above many other Christmas hymns is how it tells of this advent
- it moves from OT terms to NT terms as God is revealed in His Son Jesus
- there are strong themes of the exile in Babylon, as well as exodus from there
- God's redemptive plan is laid out in notable fashion in this hymn
- from Israel's captivity in Babylon to even the final Advent of Christ's return; all here
- but it all began with birth of God's Messiah

Learning of church's history, even its singing, can help us stand on firm ground today

- there are lessons from those who came before us we need to learn, remember, practice
- singing hymns like O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, helps with this
- rather than getting lost in commercialization and sentimentality of this time of year
- we join hands & voices with church through the ages as they teach us how to rejoice at Christ's coming

We can rejoice in Emmanuel's arrival for it delivers us from...

I. A LONELY EXILE

- exodus theme, strong thread thru/out all of Scripture, both OT & NT
- when God brought Israel out of Egypt, made a covenant with them
- He then took them toward land of promise
- this land had been key part of covenant promise made to Abraham & his heirs
- **Genesis 15:18 18 On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates**
- however, we read of this stiff-necked people, Israel, and their near refusal to enter this land
- **Hebrews 3:18-4:2 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief. 1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.**

- Israel rejected the gospel promise; we must not do the same

1. Minor Key

- while we love our Christmas hymns in major key, powerfully moving melodies, this is not
- perhaps because as God brought Israel out of 40 years of wilderness wanderings, still trouble
- yes, much excitement and hope; finally the “Land” would be theirs
- however, Moses gave them a prophetic song to sing
- filled with praises to God who was faithful to all His promises thus far
- but also filled with those minor keyed notes
- these foretold of Israel’s future disobedience and sin
- **Deuteronomy 32:20-24**

20 **And he said, ‘I will hide my face from them;**

**I will see what their end will be,
for they are a perverse generation,
children in whom is no faithfulness.**

21 **They have made me jealous with what is no god;
they have provoked me to anger with their idols.**

**So I will make them jealous with those who are no people;
I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.**

22 **For a fire is kindled by my anger,
and it burns to the depths of Sheol,
devours the earth and its increase,
and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.**

23 **“ ‘And I will heap disasters upon them;
I will spend my arrows on them;**

24 **they shall be wasted with hunger,
and devoured by plague
and poisonous pestilence;**

**I will send the teeth of beasts against them,
with the venom of things that crawl in the dust.**

- we might think Israel would hear that and avoid this mourning period
- just teach your children...catechize them regarding God’s covenant
- but sadly, Northern tribes led away by Assyria 700 years before Christ is born
- then, Southern tribes, taken by Babylon about 150 years later

2. Let the mourning begin

- Jews not only ones to know of exile from homes and land
- wars have done this again and again through centuries
- Israel’s is unique in this, however:
- only nation with whom God had made covenant
- God had given His firstborn son, Israel, land flowing with milk and honey
- land was marked by God’s very presence
- God had walked with Adam, who, by the way, is called a firstborn son in Luke 3
- the garden was the temple of the Lord—His dwelling place with man
- God did this this with Israel in promised land: dwelt in the tabernacle
- but like Adam, Israel also broke the covenant

3. Exile begins and continues

- Adam exiled from garden; Israel exiled from land & presence of God in temple

- banished to Babylon, hoping God would yet redeem them out
- ransom them from captivity, as our song says
- but not enough to just return home
- they longed for God to dwell in their midst, wrote a song about it
- song of mourning in Psalm 137, sitting by waters in Babylon with longing hearts
- underneath all this, nevertheless, was quiet melody of hope: hope of redemption
- think of Isaiah 7.14
- **Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.**
- there it was: the promise of a child to come, One who would save Israel
- and even better yet: name would be Emmanuel—God with us

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

*O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.*

As we sing on, we now come to hear of...

II. THE KEY OF DAVID & THE SHOOT OF JESSE

- this Deliverer to come would come from lineage of David, Israel's great king
- David given God's promise of this back in 2 Samuel 7
- yet, the nation lay in ruin, temple in rubble, David's lineage threatened to be cut off

1. Promise of God rings out

- **Isaiah 11:1 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.**
 - David's dynasty may have looked like stump: cut off and dead
 - but praise be to God who always keeps His covenant: something marvelous would happen
 - from this stump would come a shoot that would bear much fruit
 - unlike Judah's wicked kings, even unlike King David himself, this King would be different
 - He would be personally, perpetually, and perfectly holy and righteous
 - **Isaiah 11:2-5**
- 2 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.**
 - 3 And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,**
 - 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.**
 - 5 Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,**

and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

2. The Key

- Isaiah used by God to warn Judah & Jerusalem regarding their sin
- judgment coming, especially upon her king who trusted other nations rather than God
- in spite of this, God promised that what would seem like an insignificant one would come
- Eliakim, son of Hilkiah
- **Isaiah 22:22 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.**
- like David, though, but a shadow pointing ahead to the One who would hold the key
- in book of Revelation, John applies this to Jesus, who would come & rule His people
- and so we see & hear this theme in our song today

*O come, O Key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home.
Make safe for us the heavenward road
and bar the way to death's abode.*

Our voices ring out as we sing...

III. THOU DAYSPRING FROM ON HIGH

- many years had passed since Isaiah's prophecies rang out
- now, Cyrus, the Persian king, ruled over exilic people of God
- but God would use him, not a believer by any means, to work good for His people
- Cyrus would send Israel back to land and city and temple

1. Not quite what we'd hoped for

- upon return and rebuilding of city & temple, people saw something
- not the glorious state it once was
- so, a longing for a great visitation filled hearts with hope, even amid their tears and laments
- **Haggai 2:3 'Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Is it not as nothing in your eyes?'**
- God gave Haggai eyes of faith to look ahead, though
- **Haggai 2:9 The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts. And in this place I will give peace, declares the Lord of hosts.'"**
- a greater day was coming, even though 100s of years later

2. John the Baptist's birth foretold

- father, Zechariah, gives prophesy of Messiah who would soon follow birth of his son, John
- advent of this One would deliver Israel from enemies, would be righteous
- He would bring forgiveness of sins and light into darkness
- those who dwell in darkness would see a great light—from the Dayspring on high
- this Anointed One would be like sunrise upon dark world
- and so we sing:

*O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.*

This advent song is filled with glorious and wonderful hope, because this One coming would be...

IV. EMMANUEL, GOD WITH US

- Emmanuel, the promised One, did come
- God fulfilled His promises made so long ago, as He always does
- promises made to Adam & Eve in garden of an offspring
- **Genesis 3:15**

**I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.**

- from that time, shortly after creation, God's people looked for fulfillment of promise
- when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, God answering prayers of centuries
- here was son of David, One who would deliver His people from their sin

1. Not a political military savior

- the freedom Christ was bringing was of far greater importance than earthly freedom
- freedom from powers of Satan, sin, and death
- in singing this hymn see not only a look back to first exodus
- we see a longing look ahead to final exodus from this world and life
- not deliverance from Pharaoh, or Babylon, or any other national ruler
- rather, we will be part of exodus from oppressive rule of Satan, sin, and death

*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.*

Conclusion – A Long-awaited Fulfillment

- Christ has come, the Lord Jesus Christ was born
- is it any wonder we sing in the refrain
- **Rejoice, rejoice, Immanuel;**
Shall come to thee, O Israel

Christmas is not some sugar-coated fairy tale

- not about some geo-political king who would bring peace, some joy, and a bit less gloom
- even as we sing Advent hymns such as O Come, O Come, Emmanuel, avoid sentimentality
- so hard to do, I know; we have saturated our thinking in emotions, nostalgia, kitsch and schmaltz
- snowflakes, snowmen, sleigh rides, and cute little baby appear everywhere

Christ's long-awaited coming, however, wasn't to make us feel all warm & cozy

- fulfillment of God's promises to His people
- beginning of the final exodus
- born in likeness of sinful flesh and for sin to redeem us for His Father
- prepare a Bride for whom He would lay down His life
- this is what our hymns are meant to teach us

Let us, indeed, rejoice

- birth of our Lord has come

- God's appointed day is also coming
- all of us who have seen that great Light will see His return, Second dAdvent
- so let us celebrate and rejoice...looking back to His first coming
- but have hearts thoroughly set on His second Advent
- may we sing, Shen we see Him come in the clouds
- Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel *HAS* come to thee, O Israel!