

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT
Celebration of Carols and Lessons
November 28, 2010

Lighting of the Advent Candle

Prelude

Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

Trad./DeRousse

Call to Worship

Opening Prayer

The First Advent Scripture

Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:21-23, Malachi 4:2

Isaiah 7:14 tells us: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel."

And in the first chapter of Matthew we read: "She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,' which means, 'God is with us.'

The fourth chapter of Malachi says: But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts."

The First Advent Lesson

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel is one of the oldest Advent carol still sung today. The writer of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* is unknown. He was no doubt a monk or priest who penned the words before 800 A.D. He was also a scholar with a rich knowledge of both the Old and New Testaments.

The Latin text, framed in the original seven different verses, represented the different biblical views of the Messiah.

The words paint a rich illustration of the many biblical prophecies fulfilled by Christ's birth. "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is really a condensed study of the Bible's view of the Messiah—who he was, what he represented and why he had to come to Earth.

This song, more than any other seems to sum up Advent. In it we sing of Emmanuel—"God with us"—come to ransom us, held captive on a dark and sinful Earth. We sing of "Dayspring," the morning star. The coming Savior will bring justice, honesty, and truth. He will enlighten and cast out darkness as "The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in His wings." We sing of "Wisdom" that can reach around

the world and bring peace and understanding to all men. Thus, Christ's teachings and examples fulfilled all Old Testament prophecies.

We still have this expectation of the Messiah. Advent is a time of expectation, of preparation, of anticipation. We look forward to the coming of Christ – coming as an infant to live and work on earth – coming as an adult on a colt to reign and dwell in our hearts – coming as a Savior, laying down his life for each and every one of us – and, coming again, as risen Lord, returning to restore earth and mankind to His kingdom.

Even today, when sung in a public hall by a massive choir or by a small group of carolers, or as today, in church worship, the original chants of long forgotten monks can almost be heard. As we join and sing “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”, listen for the expectation of the Messiah that has echoed through the centuries and continues to ring in our hearts today.

The First Advent Carol

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

The Second Advent Scripture

John 1:1-18: John 3:16

In John 1:1-14 we are told: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

John continues in chapter 3 with: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

The Second Advent Lesson

How often do we ever consider what that love looks like from God's point of view? As parents, we can understand loving our children, wanting to do all that we can to give them a good and joyous

life. We can understand being willing to sacrifice our own comfort or desires in order to give our children what they need or cherish. But can we even come close to imagining what God's-love is? Can we fathom the depth of a love that would sacrifice the most precious thing in our lives? Can we even dream of making that ultimate sacrifice? Could we give our child as the Father gave the Son?

That is the message of the song, *Of the Father's Love Begotten*. This message has an almost cosmic quality, an other-worldly, eternal element that is so beyond our realm of understanding, that it defies reason and logic. God loved the world – He loved US – before he even knew us – before we even existed – before the world was created. God knew and provided for us, even though he knew what would happen. He made this ultimate sacrifice, already knowing the outcome. He KNEW – and He did it anyway. He still created the world. He still made us; He still sent His Son. And He did all this because He loves us – He loves YOU – no matter what! You are forgiven because of the Advent of Jesus Christ!

The Second Advent Carol

Of The Father's Love Begotten

The Prayers of the People and the Lord's Prayer

The Third Advent Scripture

Luke 2:25-35,

Near the end of the second chapter of Luke we hear this familiar story: "Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

The Third Advent Lesson

"Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus" is a little heavier than most of the music we are used to hearing today, and if we are not careful we will miss much of the meaning. The first verse focuses on the fact that the coming of Jesus Christ fulfilled Israel's longing for the Messiah. As the one whose coming was prophesied in the Old Testament, He is the "long-expected Jesus."

A few of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled are Isaiah 7:14, which spoke of a virgin giving birth to a child whose name would mean "God with us;" Isaiah 9:6, which told of a child whose name would be called "Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, eternal Father, the Prince of Peace;" and Micah 5:2, which said that from Bethlehem would come a ruler whose "goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity."

The prophets of the Bible looked forward to the coming of the Messiah, and many devout Jews prayed earnestly for the day when He would arrive. Luke 2 tells of Simeon, a man of faith who was "looking for the consolation of Israel" (v. 25). When he saw Jesus as an infant, Simeon knew that this Child was the fulfillment of his messianic hope. Charles Wesley was borrowing from this passage when he described Jesus in this song as "Israel's strength and consolation."

Although He fulfilled Israel's prophecies, Jesus came to bring salvation to the entire world, which is what Wesley was referring to when he described Christ as the "hope of all the earth" and the "dear desire of every nation." More than that, He is the "joy of every longing heart." He alone is the one who can satisfy every soul.

The second verse tells us why Jesus can meet our expectations: He was "born a child and yet a King." As the One who is both God and man, Jesus was able to satisfy God's wrath completely by dying on the cross for our sins. When Wesley wrote about Jesus' "all sufficient merit," he was referring to Christ's ability to bring us to salvation.

This hymn focuses on the "long-expected Jesus" who was born to set us free from sin and to bring us salvation by His death. Anticipation is a necessary and important part of every believer's life. In Old Testament times the people anxiously awaited a Messianic Kingdom. Today we should be waiting with the same urgent expectancy as did the Israelites of old. But our anticipation is the Lord's second coming—calling His bride to meet Him in the air with sound of the trumpet!

Just as Christ's birth some 2,000 years ago dramatically changed the course of human history, so will the return of our Lord as the King of kings. With the saints of the ages we pray, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus!"

The Third Advent Carol

Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

The Fourth Advent Scripture

Mark 11:9-10, John 12:13

In Mark 11 and John 12 we hear these familiar words: "Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!"

The Fourth Advent Lesson

It might seem a bit odd to be reading verses from the Palm Sunday story for Advent, but the themes are the same. The people of Israel had long awaited a Messiah. That long wait was fulfilled for them in the life of Jesus. On that Sabbath day so long ago, they rejoiced in the coming of the Messiah as he rode into Jerusalem. They rejoiced for what they perceived to be the establishment of His Kingdom on earth. They shouted together “Hosanna to the King of Kings!”

Advent is a time of anticipation – a time of preparation. It's a time of reflection and time of introspection. During Advent we look into our hearts and we prepare ourselves yet again for the coming of the Messiah. We all know the story. We know the details. We know how it's all going to work out in the end. And yet, as we prepare for the birth of Christ – for the retelling and the reliving of God coming to us in human flesh, we also look to the other advents of Christ.

We look to the triumphal entry of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords – entering into our lives, into our world, into our very being. We look for his coming to ransom us, even in his death. We also look to his NEXT coming, when he comes again to establish his kingdom. As we anticipate his coming, we say together, “Holy, Holy, Holy, Hosanna!”

The Fourth Advent Carol

Holy, Holy, Holy Hosanna

A Message for the Children

The Fifth Advent Scripture

Habakkuk 2:20, Revelation 21:22-26

In Habakkuk 2:20 we read: “But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him!”

And in Revelation 21 we find these words: “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. “And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. “Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. “People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.”

The Fifth Advent Lesson

For many, the song Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence, while beautiful, is also a bit bewildering.

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence is an ancient chant of Eucharistic devotion based on Habakkuk 2:20, "let all the earth keep silence before him." The original chant was composed in Greek as a Cherubic hymn for the Offertory of the Divine Liturgy of St. James in the 4th Century AD. Because of the obscurity of some of the words, the question is often asked "What is this song about and what does it mean?"

In main, the song is primarily a song about the Incarnation (coming in human flesh) of Jesus Christ. From all eternity he was the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity, the pre-existent Logos (Word of God) as it speaks about in John 1:1-14. Jesus steps out of eternity to become a human being while remaining fully God.

All mortal flesh (we humans) should stand in awe of the fact that God has come to earth to become man. While thinking and meditating about this, all other (by comparison) unimportant matters should be pushed aside. Our God descended to earth to become one of us, while remaining God, to whom we owe worship!

The second verse reads:

King of kings, yet born of Mary, As of old on earth He stood.
Lord of lords in human vesture, In the body and the blood,
He will give to all the faithful His own self for heavenly food.

Even though Christ is King of kings, Lord of lords and Creator of the universe, he came in human flesh as a baby, born to Mary. It is this same human flesh, now glorified, that he now gives us to consume in the Eucharist—The Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ.

The reason Jesus came was to defeat the power of hell (of death) over us, so that we will not have to live in the darkness of sin any more.

The Fifth Advent Carol

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

The Sixth Advent Scripture

Song of Solomon 2:1, Isaiah 11:1-2, 10

Song of Solomon reads "I am the Rose of Sharon, and the Lily of the valleys."

In the eleventh chapter of Isaiah we read:

“There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
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 of the fear of the Lord.
And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious.”

The Sixth Advent Lesson

Winter. I love winter. I love almost everything about it. My friends and family all think I'm nuts when I say this. They find it necessary to point out to me that winter is bleak; winter is dismal; winter is dark; winter is COLD.

But to me, winter is refreshing. It's not stifling and hot. The air is crisp and brisk. I can breathe easily. I look out my window and I see a simple landscape through the frosty panes of glass. I see contrasts. Dark against white. Bare trees against a winter sky. Occasionally, I even see a bloom that managed to find a bit of warmth from the sun and forced it's way to the surface to brighten the world, if only for a brief time.

I understand that, for many, winter is depressing. The days are short and the nights are long. Many feel alone and forgotten. But I look at winter as a time of hope. A time for reflection and anticipation.

Advent is the winter of the church year. It's a time of reflection; a time of waiting; a time of preparation. During Advent, we begin pondering the meaning of Christmas, the purpose and hope in the birth of the Messiah.

One of the songs often sung during Advent is Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming. This song comes to us from 15th century Germany. Through the ages, it has been sung in a reverent, almost awed, hushed tone – whispering the message of hope in the midst of a long, cold, dark winter.

In Isaiah, we read “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” This Scripture points to a Messianic King, from the lineage of Jesse, the father of David. In Medieval tapestries, the tree of Jesse is most often depicted as a rose plant. The song we are about to hear speaks of the hope and the desire and foretelling of that coming – the coming of a Messiah who will save the world and brighten our lives, even in the midst of winter.

The Sixth Advent Carol

Scripture Reading

Isaiah 2:1-5

Homily

Pastor Aaron Teter

The Seventh Advent Carol

Your Name

Presentation of Tithes and Offerings

Offertory

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

Helmore/Fettke

Doxology

Prayer of Thanksgiving

The Eighth Advent Scripture

Luke 1:39-56

In the first chapter of Luke, we hear this story of Mary

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever." And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

The Eighth Advent Lesson

For a child, Christmas really starts at the beginning of Advent. When they see that wreath pop up, they know what's coming, and the joy starts to well up within them. When you drive around at night and the children see the lights and you hear the oohs and ahhs, and the, "Look, at that!" And it may just be those lit-up icicles or something simple. And then you pass someone's extravagant display that almost seems to light up the entire night sky. How can you not feel joy when you see that? You have to slow down a little to behold the number of lights and ponder, "Where do they put that stuff after Christmas is over?" But it does have the effect which they intend...to bring that wonder and joy into our lives at Christmas, to remind people that light is coming into the world. It may not be in the shape of the little trolley or the Santas with the snowmen, but light is coming into the world again.

It comes into our hearts when we not only anticipate that joy, but when we open ourselves to begin receiving it, when we take a few moments of time to reflect on that and not get too caught up in preventing joy from landing on us because we're too busy, or too sad, or feeling too alone. The joy will come in, and the joy has been coming in to many of us.

As we are anticipating this coming joy, let it fall upon you. Let it fall upon you hard. Let it touch you in ways that maybe you haven't thought it might. Open yourselves to the idea that sometimes joy brings with it tears, joy brings with it deep thoughts, joy brings with it considerations that we might not always associate with joy. You can imagine Mary, in hearing those words from the angel Gabriel. You can almost feel the joy that she felt, but there was probably some fear mixed in with that. So fear and struggle are also part of what was going on with Mary. And those things, it's just natural for that to be part of where we are and what we are dealing with today too.

But the joy that Mary felt began to override any other feelings that she might have had. And Mary sang out her own song to the Lord. We've just heard that passage from Luke. But it was a way of Mary being able to express that joy to God.

As we continue in this Advent season and we get ready for Christmas Day, remember what Christmas joy is truly about. Grace and love, the promise foretold of what God would do, bringing grace and love to come and be near us. That's what Christmas joy is all about ...God's promises fulfilled – God coming into the world bringing love, redemption, and grace in and through Jesus Christ. This is Christmas joy! This is the true meaning of what we are celebrating here. It's the meaning revealed in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the joy that we are waiting for – God's love coming near – freely given – a joy that can never be taken away. No matter what struggle we might be dealing with, God's love and grace will prevail. Trust in that. Hope in that. Receive joy and be at peace.

The Eighth Advent Carol

O Thou Joyful, O Thou Wonderful

Benediction

Postlude

Of the Father's Love Begotten

Plainsong/Douglas