

“O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Isaiah 7:14; 11:1-10; 22:22

Introduction.

How you ever noticed how much time we spend preparing for things?

We spend the first 18-22 years of our life preparing for the adult working world.

We spend five days of practice preparing for one football or soccer or volleyball game.

We spend weeks buying presents and the kids are through them in twenty minutes.

We spend months preparing for a big vacation that's over in a week.

Taking a test requires hours of preparation whether it's a driver's test or SAT or CPA.

It takes hours and days to prep a house to paint.

In our worship, we encourage a week of preparation before taking communion. In the church calendar, we have two long seasons of preparation before our two most significant events. Before Easter there are six weeks of Lent and before Christmas day there are four weeks of Advent. This is a sure sign of how important these two days are.

We should not come to the manger or to the cross and empty tomb without taking some time for serious reflection and self-examination and preparation.

It is worth noting that it is our custom to always begin the advent and lent season with communion. This reminds us to prepare, to examine ourselves, to take stock of our spiritual lives, to give attention to our souls.

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel is a true advent hymn, a hymn that is not about Christmas but about anticipating the advent or arrival of Christ. It's a hymn of preparation, of eager expectation. It is filled with images and allusions from the OT which is the part of the Bible that shows us the people of God going through a long season of waiting for the coming of a Messiah.

This is one of the most ancient hymns we sing, dating back well over a thousand years. This advent hymn is an advent prayer. Each stanza begins with O come, words of longing. Words that capture our hearts at this time of year.

The original Latin version has seven verses each starting with a different title given in the OT of the Messiah. The four we are singing are Emmanuel, Rod of Jesse, Key of David and Desire of Nations.

These images are four portraits of the Messiah from a Jewish perspective. This is God's people Israel looking forward, longing and praying for a Messiah. Each name is an aspect of who Jesus is and every one of them is a message of hope in a seemingly hopeless world.

If you have read Alice in Wonderland you may recall a conversation between Alice and the Queen. Alice said: "one can't believe impossible things." "I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

These titles of Jesus announce four impossible things. It is God's nature to do impossible things. And the more impossible the better.

God created everything in this vast universe out of nothing, and with only uttering a word.

This is how God works. He makes huge promises and then makes it seem like the promise is impossible to fulfill. He tells a 75-year-old man and his barren wife they are going to have a son and become a great nation and then doesn't do any for 25 more years. He gives dreams of greatness to Joseph and sends him off to slavery and prison for the next 13 years.

He sends a Messiah and then lets Him get killed. Jesus sends out a dozen uneducated disciples to start a worldwide church.

Emmanuel.

Of all the images used Emmanuel is the most familiar to us. We remember the words of the angel to Joseph.

Matthew 1:20-23 ... an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." 22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:

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

This is an impossible thing God does, a virgin conceiving without a man. And then even more impossible, God humbling Himself and taking on human flesh so He could be with us and be like us and save us from our sin. God with us, the with us God.

Our advent prayer today is that God would be truly with us, that He would guide, guard and keep us, that He would surround and care for and protect us. That He would be our hope and strength in our exile here on earth until Jesus comes.

The Rod of Jesse.

The branch or shoot of Jesse is David, from whom comes the Messiah, of the royal line of David. Israel is compared to one tree, in fact, not even a tree but a dead stump of a tree. The prophet declares that Israel's help will come from the least impressive, least expected source, some impossible place.

The tree of David is nothing but a stump by the time of Isaiah. But from that stump will come one greater than David, a Son of David that surpasses David in every way. He will be a mighty king who can defeat Satan and death and the grave. He will conquer sin and death and free us from the tyranny of hell.

When we put our trust in anything else but God, God will cut that down, cut it out from under us. God loves us and He will not let us lose Him for the sake of something else. He wants us to find our delight and satisfaction and hope and belonging in Him.

But when God asks us to put our faith and hope and trust in Him, He is going to do that in a way that makes His way seem unimpressive by world standards.

Who believes in a book written a couple of thousands years ago, who believes in a Savior none of us have ever seen, who goes to church that believes thing hopelessly out of date and out of fashion? The world says all of this is crazy.

Look at the moral chaos in our culture today. Yet people think the Bible and the church are foolishness. Someone needs to ask how that kind of thinking is working for them. The church may look a stump but from her God means to bless the nations of the world. Someday the leaders of the world will bow down to the Lord of the church and find wisdom and moral clarity.

God means for us to walk and live by faith, trusting a God who can keep His promises even when it seems absolutely impossible. He is a God who is able to do way more than we can ask or imagine. When everything seems powerless, He is powerful. When He seems most absent, He is most present. When things seem most hopeless, He sends hope.

From a dead stump God brings forgiveness of sin and salvation, deliverance from Satan's tyranny.

The Key of David.

This is a strange title to us and clearly of Jewish in origin. It comes from Isaiah 22 and is repeated in Revelation 3.

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.

Revelation 3:7 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.

Keys represent office and authority. Keys are good for two purposes, to unlock things and to lock things. The impossible has happened, Jesus has the keys of death and hell. He came to earth to unlock hell, let us out, lock that door behind us and unlock the door to heaven and let us in and then locks that door behind us.

Jesus secures our salvation. As Peter says it is kept for us in heaven,

I Peter 1:3-5 ... he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Our advent prayer today is that Jesus would unlock our chains of sin and bondage and deliver us from bondage and temptation and sin and darkness and depression and fear and doubt.

Desire of Nations.

This title for Jesus is found in the prophecy of Haggai.

Haggai 2:7, 9 I will shake all nations, so that the treasures [desire] of all nations shall come in, and I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. ... 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.

Jesus is not just a local or regional Messiah, He is the Savior of the world, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. He is the judge of the nations and the hope of peace for all nations.

Jesus will be worshipped and glorified by the elect, His chosen people, gathered from every nation, every ethne, every people group on earth. And when they are gathered into His kingdom there will be the most incredible kind of peace ever witnessed on earth, an impossible kind never before witnessed on earth.

His power is so great that one day the most hostile circumstances and relationships will be transformed into peacefully ones. Because of Him one day the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the goat, the calf and the lion will lie down together in peace.

The garden of Eden will be restored, the curse of sin will be gone and peace and tranquility will be restored because the king has come into His kingdom.

What we see happening on earth makes peace seem utterly impossible, but it's meant to show us how great and glorious will be God's peace when it comes.

Christ is our world's only source of salvation and true peace and as long as the Prince of Peace is despised there won't be peace. Don't give up praying for the impossible, for peace in the world and peace in our homes and relationships.

Pray for our congregational meeting tomorrow evening, that we will be able to dwell together in peace and harmony and unity. And if there is disagreement, that we will handle it in a manner that honors Christ and His Spirit in us and among us.

This advent make Jesus your desire, kindle your affections, long for Christ's coming. He is our hearts true home.

Rejoice! Rejoice! The Refrain.

Four times the cry has gone out, O Come, O Come. And each time the refrain answers, the voice of faith. Rejoice, the good news is He will come, He has come and He is coming again.

Four times the aching heart prays and longs to be heard and four times there is a burst of joy.

I read the reflections this week of a person who viewed each passing year as a kind of stanza to a song with Christmas being the refrain. Each passing year is another verse in our life song and each verse is filled with hard trials and hard providences from God. Each year comes with a mix of ups and downs, hopes and failures, hurts and heartaches, and then comes the refrain.

“There is no place so lowly that Christ cannot glorify it — no heart so broken that the Savior cannot heal it, and no place so lonely that Christ cannot be a comfort in it. . . . Whatever situation you are in, the Son of God has come to it. The incarnation is not a far away doctrine — it is the doctrine that brings closure to every year of ours by singing of the glory of God — a God who came to save us. We [limp our way through the year], and He closes every year in His perfect glory and His perfect purpose, with a perfect hope and a perfect answer to all of our human struggles” (Rachel Jankovic).

After eleven months of singing with feeble and faltering voices, December comes with a crescendo that points us to God, that fixes our eyes on Jesus. This is what it is all about, this is why it all matters, this is what makes it all worth it.

This is where we can bring our broken hearts and broken dreams, our struggling relationships, our addictions, cancer, loss of loved ones and all our unrelenting weight of sin and see what the God of the impossible can do with it and how He is glorified in it. Here is where we are renewed in faith and hope because of what Jesus has done.

There are wars and rumors of wars, terrorism, death, disease, trouble. Satan still prowls like a roaring lion, our own flesh resists the Spirit, we stumble and fall again and again.

And then Emmanuel comes. He comes to shed His blood and die, to ransom our souls and pay our debt, to remove God’s wrath and secure our eternal adoption. And the refrain starts. How great our joy.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel has come to us.

The dawn of redeeming grace, Jesus is Lord at His birth.

He comes to make His blessings flow, far as the curse is found.

Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to those with whom He is pleased.

Let this Advent be a new, fresh refrain on this year that is past.

Prayer: O Come Emmanuel and hear our prayer. Increase in us a desire to know you and love you. Increase in us a hunger and thirst for you and your truth. Increase in us a longing for your coming again. May our waiting this advent be filled with your grace and provision.

And may our giving be a reflections of our hearts true joy over what you have given to us. Receive us and our prayers and our offerings now that your kingdom will come and be built up. Grant that all our gifts be multiplied by you for good.