

Day 3: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Nov. 30

*1 O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.*

Refrain: *Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.*

*2 O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who ordered all things far and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge show
and teach us in its ways to go. [Refrain]*

*3 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. [Refrain]*

*4 O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
unto your own and rescue them!
From depths of hell your people save,
and give them victory o'er the grave. [Refrain]*

*5 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. [Refrain]*

*6 O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer,
our spirits by thy justice here,
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
and death's dark shadows put to flight. [Refrain]*

*7 O come, Desire of nations, bind
in one the hearts of all mankind.
Bid all our sad divisions cease
and be yourself our King of Peace. [Refrain]*

I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut; he shall shut, and no one shall open. (Isaiah 22:22)

Over the centuries, many great marriages occur in strange ways. One of those is the

joining of the words to the music of the Advent hymn, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. First came the words. Written in Latin in the 8th or 9th century, these seven verses were used (a new one each day) during the final week leading up to Christmas. The monks actually chanted the lines, each beginning with the term *O*. The music to which we sing the hymn today was written 600-700 years later in 15th century France, but not to accompany *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*. The music was used for funeral processions.

The marriage of words and music was not consummated for another 400 years until at last, in 1854, an English musician connected them.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel has seven stanzas, each beginning with *O*, followed by a title for the Messiah drawn from Old Testament prophecies of his coming. They identified him as:

1. *Emmanuel* (Isaiah 7:14)
2. *Wisdom from on high* (Proverbs 8)
3. *Great Lord of might* (Exodus 3:15)
4. *Root (or Branch) of Jesse* (Isaiah 11:10)
5. *Key of David* (Isaiah 22:22)
6. *Thou Dayspring* (Malachi 4:2)
7. *Desire of Nations* (Haggai 2:7)

One of the best proofs of the veracity of the Bible is that the Old Testament is chocked full of specific prophecies about Jesus. The idea of the Son of God coming to Earth was not conceived on the fly in the first century Israel. Instead, it was God's age-old plan, revealed in small pieces over hundreds of years of divine activity and unfolding revelation. We see this clearly in the many Old Testament prophecies of the long-anticipated Messiah's birth. Isaiah prophesied, as referenced in our hymn's fourth verse, that Messiah would be the offspring of Jesse. In like manner, verse 5 calls him the key of David. Jesse was King David's father, so a branch coming from Jesse means a descendant of David. But not just any descendant; this one would have the "key of David," meaning, he would have the kingly authority of his ancestor.

Because they are so familiar to us, our eyes sometimes glaze over when we consider the prophecies in the Old Testament. Not so those who lived through their fulfillment! The New Testament writers documented these with great joy and wonder. Matthew 1:23, for example, notes that Isaiah's bold 700 year old prophecy of Messiah being born to a virgin was fulfilled in his day in Jesus. How could a virgin conceive? Only one answer is possible: God orchestrated it. In fact, it is God Himself who was coming into the world. "He shall be called Emmanuel, *God with us.*"

The hymn, however, does more than list God's identity as revealed by the prophets. It also contains prayers for the unfinished nature of the work he began on earth. Thus, we long for the God who is with us (*Emmanuel*) to "ransom captive Israel (verse 1) ... order all things far and nigh (verse 2) ... come, and open wide our heavenly home" (verse 5).

Each stanza is followed by the rousing chorus, "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel." That is God's promise and our hope, assured to us in part by the fulfilment of these amazing prophecies. But it is also prophesied that one day another marriage will take place. The heavenly bridegroom will return to claim us, his bride, and he will "disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight" (verse 6). Thus we cry, "O come, O come, Emmanuel."

Questions

1. When was the last time you truly marveled at God's fulfilment of his ages-old plan?
2. What would your best friend say are a couple of ways that you can do God's work today?
3. What do you most look forward to when you think of Christ's return?

Prayer

Jesus, I join with believers throughout the centuries in praying, O come, O come, Emmanuel! Yes, you came to first century Israel in fulfilment of literally hundreds of prophecies, and I marvel as I consider these things. I thank you for choosing to love me, and for including me in your kingdom. I rejoice in you this day. And I look forward to your return, Jesus, when you will put all things right. Amen.