

Isaiah 7:14; Luke 1:78

2021 Various: O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / December 24th, 2021

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

*Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

I tried to lead our college and young adults group to sing this song last weekend, and while the words were beautiful, my rendition was pretty awful. Part of the reason for that is because there's a bunch of different verses, and I wasn't always sure which one to sing. Today, we will look at a couple of the song's verses and talk about what Christmas means. I like the opening verse. It captures the heart of Christmas. "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Immanuel means "God with us," which 700 years before the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the prophet Isaiah promised would happen.

Isaiah 7:14 (ESV)

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isaiah foretold these words as God prepared to send his people, Israel, into captivity, into exile in Babylon. What is there to be hopeful for when facing exile, when facing hardship, and trial? God promises a child in the darkness. My daughter is 18 months old, and everywhere we take her, people could be walking through the grocery aisles, doing their own thing, but when they see her, their faces light up. That's what we need too, a child in our darkness, but not just any child, the Christ child, Emmanuel, God with us.

As I listened to the words of this song once again and remembered the setting of Isaiah 7, I was struck by the sadness of the lyrics, "That mourns in lonely exile here." For me, 2021 had mourning and sorrow. There were joys, time with my family and friends, but there were also deep wounds, most of all my dad dying from Covid. What was your year like? Was it hard? We're on track to lose more people from Covid this year than last. I know people I care about facing cancer and loss. What are we to do? Where can we find hope?

What most of us probably want this Christmas is not a toy but family. What we all want is to feel loved and to love others too. I think that extends to our relationship with God. We want to know God loves us, and one of the ways we know that is that God stepped down into this world to be with us, Emmanuel, God with us.

*Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer
Our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

As humankind wrestles with conflict and mourning and desperation and shame, what we need most is the "Day-spring" to "come and cheer," to "disperse the gloomy clouds of night." "Dayspring" comes from older

translations of the Bible and is a fancy way of saying, “Dawn.” We need the Son of God to be the sun in our gloom. If you’re feeling gloomy this Christmas, look to Jesus, our Sunrise.

In the gospel of Luke, Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, prophesies that his son will prepare the way for the Lord who is going to forgive sins. Why will God forgive?

Luke 1:78-79 (ESV)

because of the tender mercy of our God,
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high (“Dayspring”)
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

People are caught in exile, in the gloom, in darkness, in the shadow of death, but God promises a sunrise of peace. In the second *Lord of the Rings* movie, there’s a scene where the story’s heroes are surrounded by hordes of enemies all night, but the White Wizard promised rescue would come at the first light of dawn on the fifth day. So after a long hard night of suffering and loss, they ride out into the enemy hordes one last time, and just then, at their most vulnerable moment, rescue crests the hill with the sunrise and comes galloping down to save them. Our morning, our rescue has come. Our deliverance has arrived.

Our dawn has come in the birth of a tiny baby boy. But our rescue is completed on another hill called Calvary where the Christ child, grown into a man, paid the ultimate sacrifice, delivering us from doom and gloom through forgiveness and grace. Jesus is the greatest Christmas present of all. He has come to give us peace with each other and peace with God.

Luke talks about the tender mercy of God. God feels tender mercy towards us. Because even God knows what it’s like to need mercy. God put himself in a position of needing mercy. Who would have thought that the solution to a year like this one was a vulnerable baby boy? Most of us probably feel we need a better world. But what if we had “God with us?” What if God came into our world to bring us peace, to bring Christmas morning to all people?

O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace.

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

Tonight is dark. It is nighttime. But the reason we hold up our candles (in our case, glowsticks) is because we believe in the light of tomorrow’s morning. We believe in the daybreak, our Day-spring, Jesus. Even in a year like this one, I feel hopeful in immense loss and pain because Christmas morning is coming. Jesus promises that not only has he dealt with sin, but he will deal with it once and for all when he returns. That an even greater sunrise is coming, and God will be with us forever. Look to Jesus! Christmas is coming soon.

Pastor Jonathan Romig of Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA, preached this Christmas homily on the Westford town common on December 24th, 2021.

Discussion Questions

1. What was 2021 like for you? What were some of your joys and trials?
2. Why does it matter that Jesus is Emmanuel, “God with us”?
3. Do you find it hard to believe that Jesus is the dawn?