

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

~Other Speakers G-L: Hymn Stories:

Author --Latin origin from c. 12th century
 Translated into English --John M. Neale, 1818-1866
 Music --A Plainsong/chant from c. 13th century
 Name of Tune --"Veni Emmanuel" ("Come God With Us")
 Scripture References --Isaiah 7:14, Zechariah 9:9, Matthew 1:23

"The Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David." --Luke 1:32

The hymnal is truly an amazing collection of expressions regarding spiritual truths. It represents the experiences and feelings of people from many different religious backgrounds throughout various cultures and periods of history. This hymn, for example, finds its origin in the medieval Roman Church of the twelfth century and possibly even earlier. It began as a series of Antiphons--short statements sung at the beginning of the Psalm or of the Magnificat at Vespers during the Advent season. Each of the Antiphons greets the Savior with one of the many titles ascribed to Him in the Scriptures: Emmanuel, Lord of Might, Rod of Jesse, Day-Spring, Key of David. The hauntingly catchy modal melody for this text was originally a Plainsong or Chant, the earliest form of singing in the Church.

During the nineteenth century there were a number of Anglican ministers and scholars, such as John M. Neale, who developed a keen interest in rediscovering and translating into English many of the ancient Greek, Latin and German hymns. John Neale, born in London, England, on January 24, 1818, undoubtedly did more than any other person to make available the rich heritage of Greek and Latin hymns.

John M. Neale is also the translator of the hymns "The Day of Resurrection" (No. 89), "All Glory, Laud and Honor" (101 More Hymn Stories, No. 5), and "Art Thou Weary?" (ibid., No. 8).

Advent, beginning four Sundays before Christmas, is the season of the church year that emphasizes the anticipation of the first coming of Christ to this earth. His coming as the Messiah was first prophesied in the sixth century B.C. when the Jews were captive in Babylon. For centuries thereafter faithful Hebrews looked for their Messiah with great longing and expectation, echoing the prayer that He would "ransom captive Israel." The tragedy of tragedies, however, is the Biblical and historical fact that He did come "unto His own" to establish a spiritual kingdom of both redeemed Jew and Gentile, "but His own received Him not. . ."

Today most hymnbooks use just five of the original statements addressed to the anticipated Messiah.

Verse One--

"Emmanuel Deliverer. (Pronounced Em-manuel, not E-manuel.) God's people now separated from heaven are here compared to Israel, during its Babylonian exile, being separated from God's holy temple in Jerusalem.

Verse Two--

"Lord of Might." This is addressed to Almighty Jehovah, the One who first gave the Law at Mount Sinai to the awesome accompaniment of lightning and thunder (Exodus 19:16).

Verse Three--

"Rod of Jesse." This is a reference to Isaiah 11: 1: "and there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots." This prophecy was perfectly fulfilled with the birth of Christ, who came from the kingly line of David, the son of Jesse.

Verse Four--

"Day-Spring." This address to the Messiah means literally "sun-rising." This prophetic reference was re-echoed by the priest Zacharias in these words upon hearing of Christ's birth: "The day-spring from on high has visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:78b, 79a).

Verse Five--

"Thou Key of David." This expression is first recorded in Isaiah 22:22: "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon His shoulder." The well-known verse from Isaiah 9:6 also confirms this royal authority of Christ: "and the government shall be upon His shoulder. . ."

Truly our hearts can rejoice with God's people of all ages when we realize that Christ the Messiah did come two

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

thousand years ago and accomplished a perfect redemption for Adam's hopeless race. Yet we wait with the same urgent expectancy, as did the Israelites of old, for the piercing of the clouds--His second advent, when victory over sin and death will be final.