

November 28,
First Advent

Isaiah 9:2-7

“Guess Who’s Coming...”

“It’s beginning to look a lot like Advent! Everywhere you go. Take a look at the candlelight – glowing with all its might. Purple Paraments shining as we go. It’s beginning to look a lot like Advent – my the trees can shine. But the hope we all hold so dear, is the one who’s drawing near - to our joyful hearts. It’s beginning to look a lot like Advent...”

Indeed – we have arrived at the first Sunday of Advent: *our spiritual road to Christmas and the coming of the Christ child.* This year, each Sunday of Advent we are going dig into one of the hymns of the season. We will have matching scripture as we take our cue from the marvelous directions in which our hymns point us.

Today’s hymn is a classic – *“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”* A special song indeed. And our experience of it will be special this year. But where does it come from and why does it show up year after year? I am told if your car is over 20 years old and less than forty – it is a classic. And if it is over forty years old it is considered an antique. I’m pretty sure it doesn’t work that way with people. Or we have some very valuable antiques with us today. And I’m not sure what to call this hymn whose roots go back *over twelve hundred years.* Wow. It was originally what is called “plainsong.” It has had different melodies over the years – but the one in our possession today was test driven for us by French nuns only *eight or nine hundred years ago.*

The heart of this hymn is not only the wonderful confluence of text and tune...we feel as if we are mourning when we hear, “mourns in lowly exile here.” **O come, O come – is our prayer as we ask for the presence of God** to move in the birth of the child and in our lives. There is a marvelous joining together of the anticipation of ancient Israel and the church. We wait – and we wait on God.

Probably the most well-known unusual word of the song is Emmanuel. Few of us can manage Hebrew – but when we ask Emmanuel to come we know we live in anticipation of *God with us.* This hymn and the text from Isaiah remind us that the God we serve is not “The man upstairs” but *“God with us.”* It makes all the

difference in the world. God is not looking down at us from far away – God lives side by side with us. Come to us, Emmanuel.

Each verse of this seasonal favorite speaks of a name or attribute of Jesus. *Wisdom from on high; Lord of might; Root of Jesse; Desire of nations...* each of these speak to us as we begin our journey to Bethlehem so we will know who we are looking for. This song is a treasure chest of ways to describe Jesus. And it helps us to focus on what matters in this season of waiting. It is a lot easier to undertake an intentional spiritual journey when we are excited about *who we will find at the end.*

When we wake up in the morning and it is dark out – which happens a lot these days – moving in a positive direction can help us embrace our day. *“O come thou dayspring – come and cheer – our spirits by thine advent here.”* Dayspring – when the sun peaks over the horizon and reclaims the day. Jesus, for whom we wait, is *our dayspring – our light* – at the beginning of the day – at the end of the tunnel – whenever and wherever we need him.

Isaiah says, *“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.”* We are those people. *Everyone has seasons where we walk in darkness.* It is a hallmark of human life. But *light in the darkness and hope for living* is a hallmark of life tangled up with God. God whose life we know most fully in the one who is to be born. Whose blessing requires more than one description: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

As we begin our journey into Advent – we do not need to guess who is coming. We know – and are grateful – our hearts are filled with hope. Let us join our hearts with Gerald’s as he sings on our behalf.

(Gerald sings “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”)