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**Text:** Various

*Republic, December 1, 2024*

**Title:** "Background of Christmas Hymns, Pt 1 - O Come O Come Emmanuel"

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### **The Background and time period:**

Advent is a latin word that means "adventus" which also means "coming." It has to do with anticipating (daily or weekly) something that is coming, in this case the celebration of Christ's birth.

Advent consists of 4 Sundays before Christmas. It begins with the Sunday closest to Nov. 30. So, today, being December 1, would be the Sunday closest to November 30, which was yesterday.

Some say that Advent has a 2nd meaning, too. It is not only the celebration of Christ's birth but also the anticipation of Jesus' 2nd coming some day, when He will fulfill even more of His over all plan.

The roots of this Christmas hymn actually goes back to the 800's. The words, that became a song many, many years later, were originally used in monasteries by the monks as a part of what is called "Advent."

In the monasteries they used these words on the final week before Christmas. A monastery is a place where men (monks) or women (nuns) choose to live their lives unmarried, as well as totally dedicated to God. It involved a life of a lot of scripture reading, lots of prayer, and lots of meditation.

The men were in separate buildings than the women, & were not allowed to talk to one another. Monasteries were usually on a farm where they grew their own food, as well as raised livestock. They did their daily chores to provide for their need for food. They were committed to being totally self-sufficient. Even though men and women were both separated at the same facility, they did share food products.

### **The words of this song:**

Each line of the words began with an "O", and were called the "O Antiphons." (*Anta-fonz*)

The word Antiphon (*Anta-fonz*) is another word for Psalms.

Antiphons can be words in which 2 different groups read alternate reading some of it, then the other group reads the other part. This would be somewhat similar to how we do Readings from our hymnal where Lee Conner reads one sentence and the congregation reads the other.

Anitphons can also be sung. In that case one singer sings one part, and the other singer sings the other part. They do this back and forth until it is all done. Sometimes it can be done by

2 different choirs, alternating back & forth with singing a part of the song. I saw one example online where it showed the two choirs facing each other, with about 20 feet between the 2 choirs. They would take turns singing the different parts of the song.

Those words were restructured in verse form in the 1100's, and finally published in latin in 1710. Then, in the mid 1800's the words were discovered by an English minister named John M. Neale. **In 1851 Neale "translated" 5 total verses** from latin and was instrumental in turning it into the song "O Come O Come Emmanuel."

I'm not sure why the Nazarene hymnal only lists 4 of the verses, but there is a 5th verse that John Neale translated. I will tell you the words of that one in a little while.

Two more verses were added to the song almost 90 years later (in 1940), which made the song end up having 7 total verses. They attribute those 2 verses to Henry Sloane Coffin, a Presbyterian minister. His 2 verses were included in the 1940's Episcopal hymnal.

*The 3 verses that the Nazarene hymnal is missing are basically:*

- one about the time of Moses (Sinai) and the law,
- and two that refer to David in some way. (One about Jesse, David's father, and the other about David) I will read those 3 to you here in a little bit.

Besides translating the words for the song "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" in 1851, John Neale also wrote the song "Good Christian Men Rejoice" in 1855.

Note that Emmanuel can be spelled with an "E" or with an "I". Either way, it means "God with us."

### **Biblical basis:**

Prophecies of the coming Christ (Messiah) were being made 1000's of years before He came to earth. The spiritual state of God's people before Christ's birth had been declining over many, many years, and probably was at its worst 400 years before Jesus' birth. We actually have no scripture during the 400 years before Christ. Scholars call those 400 years "the silent years." We also know that when Jesus began His ministry, His interaction with the religious leaders, shows how messed up they were. Everything was about rules, mainly the rules those leaders made up. Their lives were a belief in God, but not following or being led by God. We actually have a lot of professing christians who live that way today, a belief in God without being led by God.

This song is about the need for the Messiah (Jesus) to come, and refers to the many years of decline before He did come. Every bit of the song has something to do with scripture.

### **Verse 1**

**O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Is--rael**

## **That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear**

Emmanuel is a reference to [Isaiah 7:14](#) "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call His name Emmanuel." In [Matthew 1:23](#) Matthew lets us know that Emmanuel means "God with us." So, we are singing O Come, O come Emmanuel, and be with us.

Verse 1 is also talking about the days of Israel where they had sinned and were held captive, (in exile) But, this also includes the spiritual state of the people before Jesus came. When we are not living right, we really are captive to our sins. It effects our thinking to where we do not think the same as when we used to walk close to God, and it will effect every part of our lives

*Now look at verse 1 again:*

**O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Is--rael  
That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear**

**Refrain:** (Refrain is basically the same thing as a "Chorus")  
**Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Em-man---uel Shall come to thee, O Is----rael**

*(The refrain repeats, again and again, the fact that the Christ is coming to live among us and to restore His people)*

### Verse 2

**O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by Thine advent here  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night And death's dark shadows put to flight**

"Dayspring" is a word that refers to dawn, or breaking forth. So, **O come, Thou Dayspring** (Jesus, breaking forth light like at dawn, or bring light to us) **come.**

**Cheer our spirits by your arrival here. Remove the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.**

Verse 2 is basically a verse where Christ's coming is going to bring light to a gloomy time and light to times of darkness, where evil kept people from hearing God. It will cheer our spirits.

*So, look at all of verse again:*

**O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by Thine advent here  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night And death's dark shadows put to flight**

**Refrain:**  
Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Em-man---uel Shall come to thee, O Is----rael

### Verse 3

**O come, Thou Wisdom from on high And order all things, far and nigh**

**To us the path of knowledge show And cause us in her ways to go.**

O come, Messiah Jesus who is full of wisdom. Order our lives, order all things.  
Give us knowledge in our lives. And, lead us in the paths you want each of us to go.

Jesus actually did all of those things when He came.

*So, again Verse 3:*

**O come, Thou Wisdom from on high And order all things, far and nigh  
To us the path of knowledge show And cause us in her ways to go.**

**Refrain:**

Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Em-man---uel Shall come to thee, O Is----rael

**Verse 4**

**O Come, O come, desire of nations; bind All people in one heart and mind,  
Bid envy strife, and quarrels cease; Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.**

The phrase "**Desire of nations; bind**" is from [Haggai 2:7](#) "And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.

The history of the Old Testament, and even our world today for that matter, has been one of nations fighting against nations. This has brought division among people. If Christ would be the desire of all nations, (all people) then He is the one who could then unite all people.

It is the same thing I have said from time to time, that the only way people can be united in a church is everyone puts themselves, their opinions, their criticisms, to the side and listen to God. As all those opinions fall away, and we just do what God wants, this is what unites people.

*So, back to verse 4 again. Look at what this song is praying for:*

**O Come, O come, desire of nations; bind All people in one heart and mind,  
Bid envy strife, and quarrels cease; Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.**

**Refrain:**

Rejoice ! Rejoice ! Em-man---uel Shall come to thee, O Is----rael

*Let me tell you the 3 missing verses to the song that our hymnal does not have. I am not going to spend time explaining those verses because it is not what we sing:*

**The 5th verse translated by John Neale, which for some reason is not in our hymnal:**

O Come great Lord of might      who to your tribes on Sinai's height (*referring to Moses*)  
 In ancient time did give the law      in cloud, and majesty, and awe.

**The other 2 verses not in our hymnal, that were added in 1940 by Henry Sloane Coffin:**

O Come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free      Thine own from Satan's tyranny.  
 From depths of hell Thy people save      And give them victory over the grave.

O Come, Thou Key of David, come,      And open wide our heavenly home,  
 Make safe the way that leads on high,      and close the path to misery.

**There is a possible hidden meaning to the song when you use all 7 verses and put each verse in a particular order:**

You end up with:

O Sapientia	( <i>Suh-pea-entee-uh</i> )	(God of Wisdom)
O Adonai	( <i>Ad-uh-nye</i> )	(God, our Lord and Ruler)
O Radix Jesse	( <i>Ray-dix</i> )	(God from The Root of Jesse)
O Clavis David	( <i>Clah-vis</i> )	(Key of David - God of authority)
O Oriens	( <i>Ore-e-ins</i> )	(God of Dawn, or rising of the East)
O Rex Gentium	( <i>Rex Gent-tee-im</i> )	(God, the Desire of all Nations)
O Emmanuel	( <i>E-man-you-el</i> )	(God With Us)

If you take the first letter after "O" you have S A R C O R E. Spelled backwards is ERO CRAS, which means "Tomorrow, I come."

I am not sure all this was intentional, just coincidence, or someone decided to make it into something that was not originally intended. But, it is interesting.

**Last thought, which is regarding the timeline:**

So, think about all I have mentioned about this song so far. It took over a 1000 years to translate the original wording into the music that it is today.

In total, when you go from the 800 to 1851, when the music for the song came, that is around 1051 years. Then, when you add another 2 more verses, 89 years after that, in 1940, now we are at around 1140 yrs from the days of the monks. Then go from 1940 to today, and the total time for these words has been somewhere around 1224 years since the days that the monks used the original words.

When we sing this song, we are thinking about the deep meaning of the song. We sing about

the day the Messiah will come and what all He will do, or can do for the world. But we are also uniting ourselves with the words other christians have used from a period of over 1224 years. All of that, makes this song a special Christmas song to sing.

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**Ending** - Singing of the song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel"