



UNWRAPPING HOPE THROUGH
THE SONGS OF CHRISTMAS

PART ONE: *O COME, O COME EMMANUEL.*



Heaven and Nature Sing: *Unwrapping Hope through the Songs of Christmas*

By David Fields

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Part One: O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

I. What Singing Does

“Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom *through* psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.” – Colossians 3:16

- We sing “vertically” – to God, in praise and thanksgiving
- We sing “horizontally” – to the community around us, instructing each other

We sing with the head and the heart; with our understanding and our emotions; gratitude in our hearts to God, and words of instruction.

Don’t like a particular song very much? Sing it anyway! Sing it because it’s for God’s praise, and it’s *for* others too!

II. Song in Focus: “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

1. Praise in the ‘Minor’ Voicing

This song offers us the musical setting of the minor key – which, for those without musical background is the chord voicing that is, for lack of better terms, sad, or maybe better – melancholy.

This song – even through the musical composition – helps us engage with the restlessness, longing and even frustration of our present experience. Advent is *for that*. This season, and this song, help us reflect on the brokenness that is still all around us, but to help us be honest about that in a way that grows our longing for God’s arrival on the scene – to judge and heal, to make right, and make whole.

This song gives words to our heart’s deepest longings – for God, and his world made new.

2. Rehearsing the Story with the Saints

We are enabled, through this song, to stand next to God’s people – Israel – and point ahead with hope to the coming Rescuer.

“Exile” means being away from home – “rootless”. To be an “exile” has the experience of longing for home. See Psalm 137, where God’s people speak of being in Babylon, a long way from their home in Jerusalem, and unable to sing their songs.

“Return from exile” is a key theme of the Gospel. Although God’s people did return from Babylon to Jerusalem, and rebuilt the temple, there was a keen sense that they were still a long way from “home” somehow; that God needed to intervene.



1. This song reminds us, importantly, that we stand in continuity with God's people over millennia. We're a part of the same story.

2. We know, from our perspective, that God makes good on God's promise. In singing this, we have reason – good reason, strong reason – to sing the rest of the song; the rest of the song that says, “Actually, yes, just like God made good on that promise, he will make good on this one too – the promise of his future coming.”

3. Rejoicing Amidst the Longing

“Rejoice! Rejoice. Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel.”

How do we “rejoice” when the world is *still so broken*?

The world is still “groaning – longing” for the return of the King to free it from the bondage of decay it is still experiencing, as Paul says it in Romans 8:22-23: **22** We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. **23** Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.”

“The world currently languishes in the throes of evil; yet this is not the intended plan of God for his creation. God has it in mind to eliminate evil through his plan of cosmic redemption... We stand in the midst of the old world dying and a new world being born anew... Recognition of God as Creator entails that we live in our Father's world, we dwell amidst the beauty and majesty of his divine architecture, and we place our hope in God's plan for the restoration of the world from its current travails.”

– Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology*

Rejoicing comes from “learning to see” with Gospel-coloured lenses.



“Joy is the appropriate response when one rightly perceives the unfolding of God's drama of salvation even in the midst of suffering and opposition.”

– Steven Fowl, *Philippians*

“Joy is simply one of the consequences of being open to that which is beyond one's self. To pursue joy for its own sake, in order to take delight in one's own delight, is to ignore this crucial “other-directedness” of joy.”

– Philip Kenneson

Life Group Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. Are there any songs of worship – hymns or more modern worship songs – that have been part of important “milestones” in your walk with God? Why is this song still significant to you and how does it still speak to your heart today?
2. Read **Isaiah 8:19-22**. Here, Isaiah presents the sort of ‘lostness’ that Israel had been experiencing because of their idolatry – their seeking something other than God as their first and best. What is the result of this idolatry for the people (see v.22 in particular)?
3. Read **Isaiah 9:1-7**. What is the future promise that is given to the people, and how will it be accomplished? How does that stir hope for you?
4. We looked at the song “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” this week in the Sunday message. This song is written in a minor key – meaning, it evokes a sense of longing and does not have a sense of peacefulness or resolve like a major key does. Why might singing in this ‘minor’ key still be significant for our present experience of ‘waiting’ for Jesus’ *second* Advent?
5. Read **Romans 8:18-24**. Paul speaks of the sort of ‘waiting in hope’ that we share with the rest of God’s created world. In what ways do we see ‘creation groaning’? How do we still ‘groan’?
6. How does the first Advent of Jesus – God’s coming to us that first Christmas – inspire your hope for this coming again? What do you long for in particular?
7. Read **Romans 8:25-27**. Paul speaks of how the Spirit helps us to pray when we are in that state of “groaning” – meeting us *in* that groaning as well, helping us to pray when we don’t know what to say, or how to say it. What are the promises that we find in this text? How do they encourage you? How might they help you to focus your prayers this Advent season?

Prayer: Consider some of the ‘longings’ that you heard present in your reflection time. Take time to invite God to bring hope to those longings you have. Take time to pray for the ‘darkness’ that many in our world still face, and that God would give us creativity to speak his words of hope into those situations and offer works that signal the coming reign of God.