



THE TRINITY MONTHLY

WHY ADVENT?

Just as children begin to be filled with anticipation in the weeks leading up to Christmas morning, the season of Advent provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the ancient longing for Messiah that filled the hearts of God's Old Testament people. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden, God immediately spoke words of judgment against the Serpent who had tempted them. But before He pronounced a curse upon Adam and Eve, and Eden itself, God first spoke words of gospel *promise*, interwoven with the sentence upon Satan: **“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” (Genesis 3:15)**

But sin marred even our ability to understand the promise, and our need of it. By nature we are a self-circumferenced people, and our perspective is invariably earth-bound. While God promised a coming savior, we blindly failed to comprehend the nature of the coming salvation, believing that it was ultimately from earthly troubles and enemies that we would be delivered.

As the effects of sin and the curse spread throughout the earth and throughout history, the seed of God's promise began to be revealed, and the portrait of a coming King - a conquering deliverer who would rescue God's people - began to take shape. Images of a coming fearsome lion, a righteous King, an indomitably mighty warrior, and a faithful deliverer became combined, in unfolding prophetic anticipation, with seemingly paradoxical images of a humble, virgin-born child, a suffering servant, a young, tender shoot, and a man despised, rejected, stricken, and crushed.

How did these pictures fit together? In the great mystery of God's eternal purposes to bring both judgment and redemption to a sin-cursed world, ultimate victory would be achieved only through ultimate surrender. Divine strength would be manifested in human frailty. Wrath and judgment against sin would be poured out by way of unconditional, sacrificial love. The transcendent God would become Immanuel (God *with us*). The invisible God would become flesh. The sinless, Holy One would become sin on our behalf, that we, the sinners, might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:17).

In it all, the Divine wisdom of *condescension* and incarnation puts all human wisdom to shame, and opens our eyes both to our true need, and to God's marvelous provision. Paul's words in 1 Timothy 3:16 couldn't be more true: **“Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.”**



This Advent season, regularly make time in your day to consider just why it was that the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace chose to submit Himself to the weakness and shame of human birth. Consider how great a love for you is proved by such an act, and with what great confidence you can now, because of the incarnation, rest in His everlasting arms, free of the darkness. Step back into the promises, and frame your heart and mind with that ancient longing for this greatest of all joys, knowing the Seed of the woman will come in fulfillment of it all.

REFLECTIONS ON LAST MONTH'S SERMONS

Framing it Up

Meditate on these things as you remember the teaching of Revelation 4 & 5

Reflect on how the attributes of God's Holiness and Sovereignty form the basis of His worthiness in Revelation 4 & 5.

What divine purposes are spelled out in the Scroll in God's right hand?

Why is no one in all of creation worthy to open, read, or execute the Will of God in the scroll?

Why is Jesus alone worthy?

Filling it In

Read these passages, and reflect on their meaning

Ezekiel 2:9-10; Daniel 7, 12:1-4; Revelation 4-5

Working Out Your Salvation

What are the implications and applications of God's Word for your life?

If Jesus Christ is the only one who is worthy to set God's Sovereign plan into motion, then He alone is worthy to govern our lives. He alone is worthy of our trust and confidence.

What are some ways in which we can tend to act as if He's not worthy of our trust, and as if we're more worthy?

How can the reality of Jesus' singular worthiness help us in:
Temptation? Fear and anxiety? Discontentment? Sorrow, trials, and sufferings?

How does the wisdom of God in the incarnation help us to trust Him more than self?

"Just when everything is bearing down on us to such an extent that we can scarcely withstand it, the Christmas message comes to tell us that all our ideas are wrong, and that what we take to be evil and dark is really good and light because it comes from God. Our eyes are at fault, that is all. God is in the manger, wealth - in poverty, light in darkness, succor in abandonment. No evil can befall us; whatever men may do to us, they cannot but serve the God who is secretly revealed as love and rules the world and our lives."

— Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God is in the Manger*

HOW CAN WE BE PRAYING?

Pray for our Church — This month, in addition to the health needs in the bulletin, let's be praying that the Lord would bring new folks and more families to our little congregation. Pray that each of us would be effectively living lives of Gospel witness, that by the testimony of our words and actions, the Lord would be drawing to Himself those in our families, neighborhoods, and places of work who are His; that we would be a welcoming congregation, seeking out those we know who are ready to hear the truth of Christ and meet Him in the worship and fellowship of our body life.

Pray for our Nation — Pray for our president, for his cabinet and staff, for our senators and representatives, our judges, our governor, our state and county legislators — first that each man and woman would know and trust in the saving grace of Jesus, and that their lives would be framed by faith in the King who sovereignly reigns over our nation. Pray they would be filled with true wisdom and understanding as defined by Scripture, that they would uphold the cause of the righteous, and punish wickedness, honoring God and giving Him thanks in all things.

Pray for the Persecuted Church — Pray for our brothers and sisters around the globe who live in a constant and intimate awareness of the world's hatred of Jesus and of His people. Pray that they would remain faithful to the Gospel, faithful to their Lord, and that their testimony would be used by the Spirit to awaken life in the hearts of their persecutors.

Pray for the Kingdom — Finally, this Advent and Christmas Season, let's be praying our lives reflect the faith and trust and love for Jesus that our mouths confess. Pray as the fullness of the season descends on our schedules, and our days are increasingly filled with plans and preparations, that through it all we would never lose sight of why we are celebrating. Pray for a spirit of patience, peace, and kindness. Pray for an attitude of humility and thanksgiving. Pray the joy of Jesus would transcend every difficulty, every stressful moment, and every painful memory. Pray the eyes of our hearts would be filled with the miracle and majesty of God in the manger.

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

It's one of my absolute favorite Christmas hymns. The haunting melody, leading to the full-throated "Rejoice! Rejoice!" of the refrain, never fails to give me goosebumps, and alerts every fiber of my being that Christmas is coming. *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* has entrenched itself so firmly and deeply into my heart, soul, and mind that even with the faintest hint of the tune or the words themselves, the taste and flavor of celebration comes rushing in, filling me with that special Christmas joy. And that was before I even knew where the song came from! As you know, learning about a favorite song's history can often deepen our already deep love for it. *O Come, O Come* is no exception.

The version we know and sing is a partial replication and translation of a series of Latin prayers written for the Church worship service probably about 1300 years ago. Historically, these seven prayers are called the "O Antiphons": *O*, because they each begin with an "O", calling on the Lord by means of seven different names; and *Antiphons*, because they were prayed antiphonally, or responsively, in the worship service. The names used in these prayers to point us to Jesus were all taken from the book of Isaiah. Those names, in order, are: *Sapientia* (Wisdom, Isaiah 11:2-3), *Adonai* (Lord, Isaiah 33:22), *Radix Jesse* (Root of Jesse, Isaiah 11:1), *Clavis David* (Key of David, Isaiah 22:22), *Oriens* (Morning Star, Isaiah 9:2), *Rex Gentium* (King of the Nations, Isaiah 2:4, 9:6), and, most memorably, *Emmanuel* (God with Us,

Isaiah 7:14). In each prayer, the Christian calls on the different names for Jesus, and then implores Him to come. The prayers are worth reading through and meditating on. Here are the translations:

- O **Wisdom**, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other mightily, and sweetly ordering all things: *Come and teach us the way of prudence.*
- O **Lord**, and Leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: *Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.*
- O **Root of Jesse**, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer: *Come and deliver us, and delay no longer.*
- O **Key of David** and scepter of the House of Israel; you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open: *Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*
- O **Morning Star**, splendor of light eternal and sun of righteousness: *Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*
- O **King of the Nations**, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one: *Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay.*
- O **Emmanuel**, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Savior: *Come and save us, O Lord our God.*

Notice the paradoxes present in these prayers: He who is Wisdom, who reaches from one end to the other, “sweetly ordering all things”, is the same Divine Lord who reveals Himself in the here and now, to Moses in a burning bush. He who is everywhere, comes down to reveal Himself in a particular way, to a particular people. Furthermore, He is the Root of Jesse and Key of David, the tribal Lord of a particular people; and yet, He is also the king of the Nations — His rule and authority transcends any one ethnic group. Do you see what this is anticipating? God with us, the Son of God born to Mary, the King of the nations placed in a feeding trough, the Bright Morning Star born in poverty and obscurity, the King of all born to lead a life of suffering and rejection, finally to be nailed to a Roman cross. This is the paradox of Christmas, the very paradox at the center of our faith. And it is why we celebrate so joyfully! For only God could write such a story. He alone could accomplish such a marvelous salvation. He has reconciled the world to Himself through Jesus Christ. And now *we can come* before the Father, standing before Him in perfect righteousness, because we stand in Jesus Himself. Therefore, Christians, rejoice! And again, I say, Rejoice!

One final thing to note. These seven prayers were sung on the seven days prior to Christmas Eve, (the 17th through the 23rd) and if you take the first letter of each of the Latin names for Jesus in order (S, A, R, C, O, R, E) and you stand looking backward, as it were, on Christmas Eve through the prayers you just prayed during the past week, the letters, now in reverse order spell ERO CRAS, which is Latin for, Tomorrow, I Come. Having prayed for Emmanuel to come, having implored and entreated Him to descend, to save us from our sins, on Christmas Eve He assures with this promise: Tomorrow, I Come. Indeed, Emmanuel has come. And He will come again.

Happy Advent and a Merry Christmas to you all!

