

## THE SPIRIT OF ADVENT

Everyone has been waiting for “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” since Thanksgiving, right?! Yet it’s only being sung this weekend, in spite of its being #1 in the Advent section of our hymnal (listed as #34, actually)—so why wait?

There are two distinct “phases” to Advent: up until the 17<sup>th</sup> the readings focus primarily on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming of Christ (in judgment, yes; but also in glory with mercy). Once we get to the 17<sup>th</sup>, though, the emphasis is more specifically on the expectation of the commemoration of the 1<sup>st</sup> Coming of Christ, looking at prophecies of His birth.

This “octave of anticipation” leading up to Christmas is marked with special invocations that are used in Evening Prayer to introduce the *Magnificat* and during Eucharist to introduce the Gospel: Christ is hailed with titles such as O Wisdom, O Adonai (LORD), O Leader of Israel, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Rising Sun, O Desire of nations, O Emmanuel. And you guessed it: these “O antiphons” are the basis of the hymn!

By holding off on this melody (a 15<sup>th</sup> century adaptation of a chant-tune), we build our own sense of waiting and expectation (impatiently, perhaps, but that’s OK). We save the texts for their appropriate time (the “octave of anticipation”). And just perhaps we might be led to examine, in our hearts, the true longings we have (and the world has) for a Savior. We might think on the text of the hymn (and the “O Antiphons” from which it comes) and do a gut-check of our own desire for God’s justice, equality, the thirst for meaning and the ache to belong—the deep desires we all have within us, as scholar Kathleen Hughes recently wrote.

The promise of Advent is not about Santa Claus or pretty creches; it is not about decorations and lights that are put up before Thanksgiving and trashed by the afternoon of the 25<sup>th</sup>; it is not about carols that arouse within us a nostalgia for our childhood, or vintage film versions of “A Christmas Carol.” Advent is about the promise of hope, comfort (which means “strengthening,” not “making you feel good”), justice and transformation.

If this is our longing, then not only can we meditate on the “O Antiphons” with great benefit; not only can we truly sing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” from the heart. We can truly make this 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday a “Gaudete”—a day of rejoicing. We can make our own the passionate prayer of the visionary at the end of Revelation: “Come, Lord Jesus!” Come to me; come to us; come and bring the fullness of your Kingdom—NOW!