

December 16, 2015
Isaiah 40:6-8

Advent Midweek 3
O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Our Advent King. Amen.

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.”

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Tonight, this third week of Advent we bid our Savior to come. This first stanza of O Come, O Come Emmanuel helps us to meditate on our text. It speaks to the fact that Israel is in exile. They are in exile in Babylon and are hoping that they will soon see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Have you had that feeling before? Have you felt that the wait was getting to you? Are you feeling that way now, as we are now just over a week away till Christmas? What about in the past, what events might trigger that “light at the end of tunnel” feeling.

For me, it was my Seminary Days. Really when the fourth year began I could begin to see the light at the end of tunnel, but I still had three quarters of classes to complete. After each week, month, and quarter went by, the light grew larger and larger. Then one day, I was sitting with my classmates in the Chapel of St. Timothy and Titus waiting for my name to be read and the place where I was going. That night, Call Day, the light got bigger but yet, these Calls were only good upon all successful completion of your Academic Work. That day would come though...Graduation Day...joy and delight filled the air. Relief had settled in.

Perhaps for some of you it was when your children were born...a difficult nine months. Each day, week, and month that goes by, the joy builds until you meet your new child, until the light at the end of the tunnel comes your way. For us that has happened two times and is now happening a third. Each birth expectation has a great amount of joy which comes with it. It's a joyful expectation as you wait for “the light at the end of the tunnel” to arrive.

And Israel's time in exile was one of the darkest periods in their history, but in Isaiah 55:12-13 the prophet announces that there is light at the end of the tunnel that their time in exile will end and they will return home. He writes: ¹² *“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. ¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the Lord, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”* ¹ This gave them hope and confidence in the future.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Is 55:12–13). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Isaiah is writing in the eighth century BC, addressing the sixth century Israelites living in Babylon. It was the year 587 BC and the monstrous reality in the Babylonian forces laid waste to the rebellious city. But then Israel wondered, "Is our God for real? If he is, does he still care? Just how can we believe in God that lost the war? The Babylonian gods and the armies are more powerful than our own...so why not worship them? The Exiled Israel has nothing left of their own. Absolutely nothing! They have everything that Babylon has...Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and foreign gods. Don't forget the Kings Nabopolassar and Nebuchednezzar. Israel does not have their king or temple. Their city was destroyed...they aren't home anymore and really they have no hope and no future.

You know, there are times that we are exactly like this exiled Israel...far from home. Far from what is comfortable? And all of us are far away from our Father. It's the way we operate. We create our own Babylon. We turn our backs on God. We are the ones that say...ah, the shopping, baking, wrapping, decorating is more important than spending time preparing our hearts for the Christ Child. We are the ones that say...basketball, football, hockey is much more important than spending time with our Lord. We are the ones that find our Christmas traditions with family and friends more important than worshipping the Christ Child on Christmas Eve and Day. We are the ones, just like Israel that say, "If God doesn't seem to care, then I'll spend my time worshipping something else. I'll spend my time focusing on other things." And just like that we have wandered away from home. And we find ourselves with no hope and no future.

In our exile though God speaks. God speaks and boy does he speak...but first his breath...his breath that typically brings life, can bring death. And that's what happened to Israel...he allowed the enormous Babylon to take out Israel. Just as the grass withers and flowers fade when the breath of God blow on it. However, that same breath causes life. God breathed into Adam and Eve and they lived. God sent a vision to Ezekiel where the dry bones came to life by the breath of God. Embedded in plant life is the potential for regeneration. There is hope for a tree. And Isaiah promises to the survivors of the house of Judah will "again take root downward and bear fruit upward." By Yahweh's grace Israel will become "oaks of righteousness, Yahweh's planting for the display of his beauty."

So you see just when Israel's history seemed closed and controlled by hopeless Babylonian imperial policy, to the shock and surprise of everyone the Lord raised up His messiah, Cyrus and Isaiah's new thing exploded in the desert. God guarantees deliverance...and this guarantee is the power and faithfulness of God's Word.

When the light at the end of the tunnel is coming, sometimes miracles happen. Think about this: There were three men at a hospital, anxiously waiting for their wives to have babies. A nurse came in and said to the first man, "Congratulation! You are the father of twins!" He exclaimed, "How appropriate! I'm the short-stop for the Minnesota Twins!" A few minutes later, the nurse said to the second man, "Congratulation! You are the father of triplets!" He exclaimed, "How appropriate! I work for the 3M company." At

that the third man jumped up and ran out of the hospital. "Why are you leaving?" asked the nurse. He exclaimed, "I don't like the way things are going. I work for Seven Up!" Now that would be a miraculous birth!

This Advent Season though we prepare to celebrate another miraculous birth...the birth of our Savior...the one who was born of a virgin. We know biology...that cannot happen, it is not possible. It is impossible for us. It is possible, though, when God is the Father of our Savior. Nothing is impossible with God. Christ's birth was a miracle.

In Bethlehem, this miracle, this faithful Word took on flesh and blood and had a heart. He also knows what it is to live exiled...he lived exiled from His Father for 33 years. Jesus was not only exiled from the Father's home, but was exiled by the Father... "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" It was there where another miracle happens...our sins were taken away. And our miracle child was slain and was dead.

However, this miracle child was given another miracle...life after being dead for three days. Our Savior lives and lives forever.

When all the wrappings and tinsel are in the trash; when the tree sits brown in the backyard; when the wheels come off the bike; and when the battery goes dead in the train, this Gift will never rust or fall apart or self-destruct. In the midst of all our temporary gifts, in Jesus Christ, we have a Gift that remains forever. I plead with you to come to worship next week to once again hear from and about the greatest gift ever given, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Each year millions of dollars are spent in preservation...even to preserve some of these gifts at Christmas. You see it on the TV and on the internet and even in magazines: rust protection to wrinkle reduction, Americans are obsessed with preserving what we have. However, everything wears out...from our automobiles to arteries, nothing remains forever. With one exception: *The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.* The Word of God...who is the Word made flesh, who is the miracle baby born of the Virgin Mary will stand forever. For He is the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last. He is the one that will indeed last forever. He is the one that will never turn your back on you, even if you turn your back on him. He will seek you...and when He sees you even in a long way off, he runs to you and says to you, "Welcome home, my son." "Welcome home, my daughter." "I love you." And he stretches out his hands and says, "This is what I did for you!" and shows you his hands and embraces you!

Jesus Christ will remain forever. The greatest Christmas gift ever, will remain forever.

In Jesus Name, our forever Advent King. Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord, our forever Advent King. Amen.