

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

(December 8, 2024)

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Sermon manuscript

### Merry Christmas!

## O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

(Romans 5:8)

Study #1

**Introduction:** Led by a song...

Our normal practice here at Northwest is to have Sunday morning messages center on a Bible passage. We are a Jesus-centered church and a Bible-centered church. That's just what we do.

And then, in support of that main Bible passage, we'll include support material - illustrations, a song, or a story to help explain the main message of the Bible passage.

During this Christmas season, I'm switching things around. I'm using supporting material to launch us into the biblical story.

On each of these three Sundays of Advent, a well-known Christmas carol will set the stage for the story of Jesus' birth.

This morning, our song is, "**O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.**"

The words of the song are ancient, dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century (maybe even as long ago as the 8<sup>th</sup> century). Originally written in Latin, the verses were translated into English in the mid-1800's.<sup>1</sup>

The song is loosely based on a biblical prophecy that says, **[Isaiah 7:14] a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.**

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<sup>1</sup> By Mason Neale and Henry Sloane Coffin.

The song gives voice to the desperate longing of God's people for deliverance. They long for God to do what only He can do - deliver them - and what He will do through Immanuel (or Emmanuel).<sup>2</sup>

The Old Testament referred to this deliverer as *Messiah*. We know that around the time of the birth of Jesus, Jewish hopes were running at a fever pitch for the arrival of Messiah.

Hopes for a deliverer always run high during tough times. And times were tough in Israel in those days. Really tough.

### Son of God Sent to Rescue Us from Our Messes

#### Israel in the Years Leading Up to Jesus' Birth

*Israel's sorry plight at the time of Jesus' birth...*

The years right before the birth of Jesus were not at all glorious. However, Israel's ancient past had some very glorious highlights.

Out of Israel came mighty judges - Gideon, Samson, Deborah, and Samuel. There were God-fearing kings like David and Solomon and Jehoshaphat and Josiah. But that was then.

At the time of Jesus' birth Israel was subject to another kingdom, Rome, whose king, Caesar, was hundreds of miles away.

Caesar's surrogate ruler over the Jews was Herod, a non-Jewish tyrant who made the Jews' lives miserable. Herod built himself opulent palaces paid for by the heavy taxes he levied on the people.

Because of those Roman taxes and Roman domination, the Jews were poor, were thoroughly oppressed, and, not surprisingly, depressed.

To make matters worse, the Jewish rulers were mostly corrupt.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> This is a transliteration of a Hebrew word that literally means "God with us."

God had called leaders of His people to lead His people into His ways. They were to be the people's shepherd. But the Sadducees and Pharisees and priests held tight to their positions for personal gain.

Added to all of these hardships was what would have been, for the God-fearing Jew, the most grievous hardship of all, the lack of communication from God Himself.

God had often spoken to His people. He spoke to Abraham and to Isaac and to Jacob. He gave Moses the Law. He wrestled with Jacob, whispered to Elijah, and spoke to and through the prophets.

But it had been over four centuries since there had been any communication from God to His people. Not since the days of Malachi (5<sup>th</sup> century, B.C.) had God spoken.

As much as every Jew would have told you that he was honored to be a Jew, being a Jew during the days of Caesar Augustus was hard.

There were virtually no freedoms, no rights, no political powers, or privileges. All power lay with Rome, and Rome treated the Jews with contempt. Rome withheld justice and mocked their religion.

Now, there are any number of ways to respond to suffering and hardship of this sort.

The Jews might have given up and lost hope. They might have gotten angry, rebelled, and revolted. They might have simply become apathetic cynics.

Well, to their great credit, most of the Jews living in the days of Caesar Augustus did none of that. No, they cried out to God for deliverance. They begged God to send Messiah.

Like we sing in the song -

**O come, O come, Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lonely exile here...**

*Israel longed for God to send Messiah*

Alfred Edersheim was a Jewish Bible scholar who lived in the 1800's. I have long relied on Edersheim for his scholarly insight into Scripture and for his in-depth knowledge of Jewish history.<sup>4</sup>

He wrote about the high hopes for the arrival of the Messiah at this low point for the nation. He tells us that the Jews held fast to a hope that God would meet them at their point of need, would make things right, would send Messiah.

*"Despite national apostasy, the disappointing failure of the Maccabees, the tyrant rule of Herod, and the administration of a corrupt priesthood, the people still intensely longed for Messiah. In fact, they longed for Him in direct proportion as it seemed unlikely for Him to come at all."*

That was then. Hard times. A desperate longing that God would do what only He could do for them through the Messiah.

Now, let's fast forward two thousand to today. Having seen the sorry plight of the Jews at the time of Jesus' birth, what about us?

**Fast Forward Two Thousand Years**

*Our sorry plight, 2024*

You and I could easily compile a list that would rival the brokenness of first-century Israel.

On the social and cultural front, we see serious international tensions, drug and human trafficking, and an increase in local violence.

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<sup>3</sup> These men were allowed by Rome to rule to give the Jews the illusion of self-government. But these rulers were always puppets of Rome.

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<sup>4</sup> Edersheim's *magnum opus* was [The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah](#).

We see the damage done - especially to young people - by social media, the tragedy of broken families, abuses by authority figures, and the wreckage left behind from addictions of all kinds.

And then there is spiritual brokenness.

There are increasing numbers of people who claim *spirituality* absent faith in God. More and more people identify as *nones* (no religion; no faith), spiritually speaking.

And then, religious options that twist the truth of Jesus into something biblically unrecognizable are growing. So are religions that deceive and enslave the lost people who follow them.

The wreckage in our world today is overwhelming. The wreckage in the lives of people we love is overwhelming. It's enough to break your heart.

So, let it. Let it break your heart.

Take it all in. Absorb it and don't deny it. Let's not retreat to a safe bubble and pretend the ugliness isn't there.

Now, having put aside denial, what will you do with the ugliness you see?

*We long for God to work through Messiah, Jesus!*

We won't become angry and throw a fit. We won't withdraw, throw in the towel, become depressed and morose, shrug our shoulders and retreat to an apathetic cynicism.

No, we'll follow that beautiful example of the first-century Jews. Living under the tyranny of Rome, they expressed their longing for the direct intervention of God. And we can do the same today.

Yes, there is brokenness all around us. But we're in a far better place than those first-century Jews were who lived under Caesar and Herod, because Emmanuel is here.

We don't cry, "*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*" the way the Jews did two thousand years ago. God has sent His Son. He has intervened in history in a way He never has before.

And having sent His Son, God isn't finished directly intervening in His world.

The arrival of Jesus was the most astounding intervention. But it wasn't the last intervention. The arrival of Jesus is the foundation for all of His other interventions.

And what the crises of our world need, above and beyond anything else, is the intervention of God.

Years ago, a man named Konrad Kern was an Elder here at Northwest. Konrad was famous for making a point with a flair. He used to say, when our church faced this or that crisis, "*There is no problem here that a little miracle wouldn't fix.*"

Konrad was right! An intervention from God would fix everything. All we need is for God to barge in, to meddle.

And the good news is that our God is still very much an intervening, meddling God.

It takes courage to boldly pray for God's intervention because He intervenes according to His own timetable. But He does respond to our prayers.

And, given the desperate condition so much of our world is in, it just makes sense to *desperately long for* and to *desperately pray for* God to do the things that only He can do.

This morning let's agree to join with the ancient Jews and ask God for break-throughs. Let's ask Him to do the things that only He can do.

Let's ask Him to save souls, change lives, restore marriages and whole families, heal bodies and minds, and break addictions. Let's ask Him to plant hope where there is none.

We hear that desperate longing in the words of our song for today.

**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.**

There is another theme I want us to see from our song this morning. As the writer wrote of a desperate longing for Emmanuel's arrival, he mentioned Emmanuel's lineage.

In the second stanza we sing of Messiah's ancestry: **O come, Thou rod of Jesse...**

That prompts us to think about the genealogy of Jesus, the Messiah. Jesus' genealogy was, first of all, a royal genealogy.

### **Son of David Sent to Save Us from Our Sins**

#### **Messiah's Line**

*A royal genealogy*

#### Abraham and kin

We can trace the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah all the way back to the beginning.

After the sin in the Garden, God promised Adam and Eve that the offspring (seed) of the woman would one day crush the serpent's head (that is, Satan).<sup>5</sup>

That was God's promise that Satan doesn't get the last word. In the end, God wins. Eve's "**seed**" will have the final victory.

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<sup>5</sup> Genesis 3:15

And we are able to trace the path of that promised "seed" from Adam and Eve forward in time.

Among the more prominent historical ancestors of the Messiah was Abraham, the father of the Jews.

God called Abraham from his home in Mesopotamia. God promised to bless Abraham.<sup>6</sup>

On at least four separate occasions (Genesis 12, 15, 17, 22), God promised that from Abraham's descendants would come a people and that from that people would come a Savior, a Deliverer - the One the Jews would later call *Messiah*.

The first generation after Abraham leading to that Deliverer was born - miraculously! - to the one hundred year old Abraham and his ninety-year-old wife, Sarah: Isaac.

The line continued from Isaac to Jacob and to Judah,<sup>7</sup> through the generations that lived in Egyptian bondage until the Jews entered the promised land of Canaan.

#### David, Solomon (2 Samuel 7)

Once in Canaan, the Messiah's line passed to Salmon, to Boaz, to Obed, to Jesse - and then to David, the king!

Eve's seed was a royal seed, finding its way to David.

Then, the seed went forward through Solomon and then through every one of the kings who sat on the throne in Jerusalem!<sup>8</sup>

The line of Messiah ("**the rod of Jesse**") is a royal line.

But Messiah's royal line has a dark side. There is scandal in the genealogy of Emmanuel.

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<sup>6</sup> That is definitely the sense of Genesis 12:3.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 49:10 clarifies that the ultimate ruler will come from the tribe of Judah.

<sup>8</sup> That means every king of the southern kingdom came from Judah, while the rebel northern kingdom was ruled by Jewish kings of many different family lines.

It is not unusual to find scandal in a genealogy. (Mine has a few horse thieves and cattle rustlers...) But we might have thought that God would have protected the line of Emmanuel, from ugliness. He did not.

The ugly parts of the story of the Savior's line are every bit as important as the royal parts.

*A scandalous genealogy*

Read Genesis 38 and you'll discover the horrible way in which Judah became the father of Perez.<sup>9</sup> It involves gross sin on the part of Judah, and it's a story I won't tell now.

Later on in the story of the Jews, we read about a woman named Rahab. She was the one who hid the two Jews who spied on the city of Jericho before Israel attacked and defeated it. (See Joshua 7)

Rahab was a woman of great courage and faith. But are you surprised that God allowed her - a prostitute - to have a place in the line of Messiah?

Well, He did. Rahab married Salmon who was a descendant of Abraham.

Then, they had a son named Boaz, who married a woman named Ruth who was a member of the cursed tribe of the Moabites. Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Judah married a Canaanite woman who bore him two sons, Er and Onan. When Er, his older son, came of age, Judah gave him a Canaanite wife named Tamar in marriage. In short order, both Er and then Onan died by the Lord's hand because they were sinful. Then, Judah, the father-in-law, promised Tamar, who was twice a widow, that he would give her his third son, Shelah, to be her husband when he grew up. Well, Judah didn't keep his promise to give Tamar to be Shelah's wife. So, she took matters into her own hands. She dressed herself as a prostitute, and stationed herself by the side of the road as prostitutes did in those days. When Judah walked by her, he paid her a harlot's wage, not recognizing her. Later, when Judah was told that Tamar, his daughter-in-law, was pregnant, he became indignant at HER immorality! But she was exonerated when she revealed that HE was the father of the child.

And for a final ugly, consider this.

The seed of the coming Messiah passed from David to Solomon. Solomon's mother was Bathsheba.

Bathsheba was the wife of one of King David's choice warriors, Uriah the Hittite. But even though she was married to Uriah, David took her and lay with her. And then, when David learned that she was with child, he murdered Uriah to cover his sin.

You may wonder why God would have allowed such atrocities in Messiah's line. Why not protect Messiah from such shame as Judah's hypocrisy, Rahab's harlotry, Ruth's foreignness, and David's sin?

God allowed such things in Messiah's line to highlight His grace and to highlight His heart for a broken world.

The unexpected parts of Messiah's lineage may not appear to be any great encouragement - but they are.

No. The stories of Rahab the Canaanite and Ruth the Moabite don't enhance Jewish nationalistic pride. But through their stories we learn that (just as the Lord promised Abraham) Messiah will not be for the Jews only, but for the whole world.

Judah's Tamar-story and David's Bathsheba-and-Uriah-story highlights that human sin will never thwart God's purposes. God will use sinful, failing men and women to accomplish all His will, and to bring blessing to the world.

So, Messiah's genealogy is a ROYAL and a SCANDALOUS and a REDEMPTIVE genealogy.

The truth is that the kinds of people we find in the genealogy are precisely the kinds of people God sent Messiah to save.

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<sup>10</sup> Both the Ammonites and Moabites were tribes that had their beginnings with the immorality of Lot, Abraham's nephew. (See Genesis 19:30-38) Yet God arranged things so that Salmon's and Rahab's son, Boaz, met a Moabite woman (Ruth) and bore a son who figured prominently into the line of the Messiah.

His genealogy proves that God can turn any mess - including your messes and my messes - into something beautiful.

Messiah, Emmanuel, David's Son has come. And His arrival has brought the most amazing story of shameful sin overcome by glorious grace the world has ever seen.

The prophet Isaiah predicted, hundreds of years before Jesus was born, that the Messiah would be the One who would overcome humanity's sin and shame. He will be GREAT.

### **Messiah's Saving Work**

*A Mighty King (Isaiah 9:6)*

***[Isaiah 9:6] For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.<sup>11</sup>***

There is no surprise here. When we look at the genealogy and see Messiah's royal lineage, we expect that He will wear a crown. And one day, He will certainly wear a kingly crown.

We would not have expected that the only crown Messiah Jesus would wear when He came in the days of Caesar Augustus was a crown of thorns.

But that is what happened, because the role of Emmanuel when He came the first time was to be a *Suffering Servant*.

*A Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53)*

In Isaiah 53 we discover that the Messiah will suffer cruelly. The description of Messiah in Isaiah includes the words "**pierced**" and "**crushed**." Those words speak of terrible suffering.

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<sup>11</sup> The birthplace of Messiah was also predicted in Micah's prophecy to be the hometown of King David, the tiny village of Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2)

This is a prophecy of the fulfillment of the promise made in the Garden of Eden. Emmanuel will reverse the curse. He will take away the burden of sin and guilt by taking upon Himself our guilt and shame.

Remember the theme of our song for today: Desperate longing for the arrival of Emmanuel at a time of great need.

That is exactly the story of Jesus. He came to earth to redeem us BEFORE we had solved our problems, PRIOR to getting our acts together, and IN ADVANCE of our getting good.

He arrived when we were in desperate need. This is how the Apostle Paul puts it:

***[Romans 5: 8] But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.<sup>12</sup>***

He came to us while we were lost.

Now, here is my story. I am still a mess. People who know me well will affirm that. I've got failings of all sorts.

On any given day I will struggle with failure of nerve, lack of resolve, prayerlessness, impatience, and/or selfishness.

I'm a mess. But I'm not lost. I once was lost, but now I'm found.

Jesus found me and saved me when I believed in Him for eternal life. And what our song begs for God to do has become my story of what God HAS DONE.

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<sup>12</sup> Or, as he says in his letter to the Galatians, God sent Jesus just in the nick of time. (Galatians 4:4-5) When we read there that Christ came "**in the fullness of the time**" we understand that there was a timeliness to Jesus' appearance. He came during the *pax Romana*, a three centuries-long season of unparalleled peace and world stability that dominated the Indo-European world. At the time of Jesus' birth there were good Roman roads and a common language (Greek). Paganism's decline created a vacuum into which Christianity easily slid.

**O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free  
Thine own from Satan's tyranny  
From depths of Hell Thy people save  
And give them victory o'er the grave  
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel.**

It is my hope that this is your story. And if it is not yet your story, I hope that it will become your story.

Jesus said that He would give eternal life to the one who believes in Him. That's His promise.

He gave Himself for you on the cross and rose from the dead for you. He is both Lord and Savior. He is altogether trustworthy. You can trust Him to keep His promise. You can believe in Him. Today.

The thoroughly biblical theme for this morning springs from the words of a very old song. It is the theme of our desperate eagerness for God to do what only He can do.

Eagerness is easy for six year olds. Watch them on Christmas morning. But eagerness isn't just for kids.

As we wrap up today, we'll see an oldster who is the picture of desperate eagerness. To take in this scene, we move eight days past the birth of Jesus.

### **Son of God Sent to Bring Us Eternal Life and Joy!**

The Law of Moses commanded that on the eighth day of a boy's life, his parents were to have him circumcised and dedicated to God.

So, we watch Joseph and Mary walk into the Jerusalem temple. They have brought an offering for Jesus' dedication. (It was the offering approved for the poor, two turtledoves and a gift of five shekels.)

Off to the side, there is an old man. His name is Simeon.

Simeon isn't a major player in the New Testament, but he is an intriguing man - especially on this day.

Luke tells us that the Spirit of God had revealed to Simeon that He would see the Messiah before he died.

Can you imagine getting that kind of a promise from God?

If God told me that I would see snow in San Antonio this winter, I'd be getting up every morning all winter long and looking out the window to see if, just maybe, today was the day.

I have to believe that Simeon woke up every day, looking at every man he met, asking God, "*Is that the One, Lord?*"

He was always on the lookout, was always searching crowds to see if THAT guy might be the Messiah.

On Jesus' eighth day of life, Simeon walked into the temple courts just as Joseph and Mary brought their Son in for dedication. The Holy Spirit let Simeon know that that, on this day, Messiah was present.

Can you imagine the thrill going through this old man's soul?

Simeon was looking around, waiting for God to reveal to him which one of these fine young men, worshipping fervently in God's temple was THE ONE?

Then, just as the priest dedicated the infant Jesus, just as Simeon heard the priest say His name, "*Yeshua*" (Jesus/Savior), the Spirit let him know that Messiah was the infant in Mary's arms.

And in what must have been unfettered joy, Simeon took the baby Jesus in his own arms, blessed God, and said:

***[Luke 2:29] "And now Lord, You are letting Your bondservant depart in peace,  
According to Your word;***

***[30] For my eyes have seen Your salvation,  
[31] Which You have prepared in the presence of all the peoples:  
[32] A light of revelation for the Gentiles,  
And the glory of Your people Israel.***

Or, as our song has it,

**O Come, Desire of nations, bind  
In one the hearts of all mankind;  
Bid every strife and quarrel cease  
And fill the world with heaven's peace.**

**O Come, Thou Dayspring from on high,  
And cheer us by thy drawing nigh;  
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night  
And death's dark shadow put to flight.**

Simeon knew that the promise that he would see Messiah was fulfilled when he saw that Baby. He knew that the infant he was holding was the key to his own and every other person's greatest need.

And this is who Emmanuel, the Messiah, Jesus is to us. And for that reason, we sing -

*Rejoice, rejoice!  
Emmanuel has come to us in Jesus Christ our Lord!*