



Advent 2022: Singing God's Word

by Bernard Gabbott

Memory verse:

Suddenly there was a multitude of the heavenly host
with the angel, praising God and saying:

Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and peace on earth to people He favours!

Luke 2:13-14

God's people are a singing people—in fact, as you read the last book of the Bible, especially chapters 4-5, you will notice that we will do this for a long time. And so we sing now... And there is no more singing time for many of us than Christmas. In fact, it is one of those moments when our songs spill into the wider world and we have the opportunity to mix and share through our songs.

The songs we are looking at this Advent—the time to remember 'waiting', both for the first coming of God's promised King and his return—are songs that are popular, well-known, and steeped in God's word. As we look at them, we will be given a tour of so much of God's word—and given the opportunity to use them to point those who don't know Jesus, to Jesus!

Study 1:
O come, O come Immanuel

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.*

O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height
in ancient times didst give the law
in cloud and majesty and awe.

Rejoice, rejoice . . .

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 . . .

O come, Thou dayspring, come and cheer
our spirits by Thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice, rejoice . . .

O come, Thou key of David, come
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.

Rejoice, rejoice . . .

1. Spend a moment as a group, and write down every Biblical reference/allusion, and the passages in the Bible you think are being referred to.

2. The first verse seems to reference Isaiah 7, 9:1-7, 35, 40:1-2 (cf. Mk 10:45). What truth is being sung here?

3. The second verse seems to reference Exodus 19-20, and Isaiah 33:22. What truth is being sung here?

4. The third verse seems to reference Isaiah 9, 11, and Romans 15:8-13. What truth is being sung here?

5. The fourth verse seems to reference Isaiah 22:20-25. What truth is being sung here?

6. The chorus repeats a common command, request, expectation. What is it, and how is it connected to the verses?

7. One writer describes this whole song as a considered meditation on Isaiah 11. Read Isaiah 11, and see why this might be the case.

8. Why is this a song to be sung now, in Advent, the time of waiting? What are we singing about our desires and hopes?

Study 2:
Hark the herald angels sing!

Hark! the herald-angels sing,
'Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.'
Joyful, all you nations rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with the angelic host proclaim,
'Christ is born in Bethlehem!'
*Hark! the herald-angels sing,
'Glory to the new-born King!'*

Christ by highest heaven adored,
Christ, the everlasting Lord,
late in time behold Him come,
offspring of a virgin's womb!
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see!
Hail, the incarnate Deity!
Pleased as man with man to dwell,
Jesus, our Immanuel.
*Hark! the herald-angels sing,
'Glory to the new-born King!'*

Hail, the heaven-born Prince of peace!
Hail, the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
risen with healing in His wings.
Mild He lays His glory by,
born that man no more may die;
born to raise the sons of earth,
born to give them second birth.
*Hark! the herald-angels sing,
'Glory to the new-born King!'*

1. The first verse starts its account of the Christmas story in the middle! Read Luke 2:1-20, and locate the quotations in the Bible used in the first verse.
2. The second verse is a dense theology of the Incarnation. Read John 1:1-18 and Ephesians 1:3-14 and Philippians 2:5-11, and note down all the connections referred to in this verse.
3. The third verse is a reflection on the glory of this child-King. Read Isaiah 9:1-7 and Malachi 4:1-6 and Philippians 2:5-11 and John 3:1-16 and John 1:1-18, and note down all the connections referred to in this verse.
4. The repeated chorus draws out a key command spoken/sung by the angels. What is it, and why is it crucial?
5. Why is this a song to be sung now, in Advent, the time of waiting? What are we singing about our desires and hopes?

Study 3:
O come all you faithful!

O come, all you faithful,
joyful and triumphant,
O come now, O come now to Bethlehem;
come and behold Him,
born the King of angels:

Chorus:
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord!

True God of true God,
light of light eternal,
He, who abhors not the virgin's womb;
Son of the Father,
begotten not created:
Chorus

Sing like the angels,
sing in exultation,
sing with the citizens of heaven above,
'Glory to God,
glory in the highest':
Chorus

Yes, Lord, we greet You,
born this happy morning,
Jesus, to you be glory given!
Word of the Father,
now in flesh appearing:

Chorus

1. This carol begins with an invitation—what is it, and what does it do to the perspective of the singer?
2. The first verse seems to refer to Luke 2:1-20. What does it refer to, and what invitation does it extend?
3. The second verse is almost a word-for-word quotation of the Nicene Creed (see the end of this booklet). What does it refer to, and what result is achieved in singing this?
4. The third verse refers explicitly to the chorus spoken/sung to the shepherds in Luke 2:13-14. What is its invitation?
5. The fourth verse takes us into both the ‘stable’ (Luke 2:1-7) and the account of all history and Scripture in John 1:1-18. What does this verse do to us as the singers of these words, standing in both the ‘stable’ and the stream of God’s work?
6. The chorus is a repeated invitation to each other—what is it? And what is striking about who is being ‘adored’?
7. Why is this a song to be sung now, in Advent, the time of waiting? What are we singing about our desires and hopes?

Study 4: Joy to the world!

Joy to the world, the Lord has come!
let earth receive her King;
let every heart prepare Him room
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing!

Joy to the earth, the Saviour reigns!
your sweetest songs employ
while fields and streams and hills and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground:
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found,
Far as the curse is found,
Far as, far as, the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of His righteousness,
the wonders of His love,
the wonders of His love,
the wonders, wonders of His love.

1. Isaac Watts original version of this carol was based on Psalm 98. Read that psalm and see what Watts has done with it, in light of the coming of Jesus...
2. How do verses 1-2 reflect Psalm 98?
3. The third verse is a little different. It refers to why it is good that the King has come. Read Genesis 3, 12:1-3, and Romans 5:12-21, and see how these inform this verse...
4. The fourth verse turns to the ideas of Isaiah 9:1-7. How are these ideas reflected here?
5. What truth does this carol present before the world, and why is this so possible?
6. Why is this a song to be sung now, in Advent, the time of waiting? What are we singing about our desires and hopes?

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.
We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father.
Through him all things were made.
For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:
by the power of the Holy Spirit
he was incarnate of the virgin Mary, and became man.
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again,
in accordance with the scriptures;
he ascended into Heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,
who proceeds from the Father and the Son.
With the Father and the Son, he is worshipped and glorified.
He has spoken through the Prophets.
We believe in one holy universal and apostolic Church.
We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.