

Come, Lord Jesus



*A Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols
in the Monastic Style*

December 24, 2008 7:00 pm
The Community Comes Together

Prelude

Please take this opportunity to set aside all the busy-ness of the holiday season and instead center on the presence of Christ in our midst.

Welcome

This Christmas Eve Service is based on a medieval monastic order of worship that has been part of the Christian experience for at least nine centuries, perhaps much longer. It uses readings called the “O Antiphons.” You know them even if you have never heard this phrase before because they are the basis of our carol “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” Tonight we will explore the seven “O Antiphons”—what they reveal about the coming of the Messiah and how they connect with the Christmas story. This will be a service of invocation because we are calling the Messiah to come to us, to descend to us, to abide with us, to be born in us. Come, Lord Jesus, is our prayer and our song tonight.

Before we begin, please take an opportunity to sign the white registration folders so that we might have a record of everyone’s attendance this evening. While you are doing that, I would like to go over a few details about the service with you. First are two brief choruses that we will be singing in the service. “Come, Holy Spirit” is a Tanzanian prayer chorus that we will sing as a response to each petition in our opening prayer for the Holy Spirit. The words are printed in your bulletin in the description of the Prayer for the Holy Spirit. Manna will now sing through the chorus once, and then I would like for us all to try it. SING: Come, come, come Holy Spirit come! Come, come, come Holy Spirit come! “He Came Down” is a prayer song from Cameroon that we will sing in response to the reading of each O Antiphon. The words are printed in your bulletin in the description of the Sung Response. Manna will now sing it once, and then I would like for us all to try it. SING: He came down that we may have love. (Repeat three times.) Hallelujah forevermore! O come, O come, Emmanuel! Hallelujah forevermore!

And finally, most importantly, is that we will not be staying in the sanctuary for the service. Immediately after “O Come, All Ye Faithful,” our Call to Worship, we will process in silence

to the Activities Building. Please follow me as we leave down the center aisle, go through the metal doors and the end of the breezeway, and continue down to the Activities Building via the lighted sidewalk. Please use this time as prayer to center your souls and calm your minds to receive the Christ Child this night. As you walk, consider all of those who have walked the Christian journey before you—from the saints of old, to the monks who gave us this service, to your loved ones who made the Christmas story come to life in you. Or, you may wish to reflect on the journey Mary and Joseph took to Bethlehem, themselves on the threshold of welcoming the newborn king into their hearts. Or, you may wish to reflect on the Prophet Isaiah's words: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined." What deep darkness do you face, and how does the Light of Christ shine through the darkness for you? Let us now call our hearts and minds to worship.

Call to Worship: "O Come, All Ye Faithful"

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Silent Procession

As we walk to the Activities Building, please be in an attitude of prayer, meditating on these words from Isaiah: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

Prayer for the Holy Spirit

For this prayer, I will offer petitions for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Please respond to each petition by singing the Tanzanian prayer chorus, "Come, Holy Spirit": Come, come, come Holy Spirit come! Come, come, come Holy Spirit come! Let us pray.

Come, Holy Spirit. Rouse us from our slumber and make us attentive to the nearness of Christ's presence—that we may discover His Word in every sound of this world, His touch in every embrace, and His love in every encounter with another. SING...

Come, Holy Spirit. Move upon this hurting earth. Inspire us to work for peace and justice among the fragmented and warring factions of humanity. Empower us to be bearers of your grace to all those who now suffer. SING...

Come, Holy Spirit. Comfort the poor, the helpless, the cold, the hungry, the oppressed, the sick, the lonely, the unloved. Open our eyes so that we may see the face of Christ in the least of these, in our brothers and sisters. SING...

Come, Holy Spirit. Set our hearts on fire. Set our hearts on fire with the Light of Christ burning in the darkness of this winter's night. Set our hearts on fire to spread the Good News of Great Joy. Set our hearts on fire with love and adoration for the Christ child. Set our hearts on fire so that we might in turn spread the fire of our faith: The Messiah is Born! Praise be to God! SING...

The Community Hears and Responds to the Word

The First Lesson: Come, O Wisdom

O Wisdom, you came from the lips of God most high, and you reach from eternity to eternity, powerfully and gently ordering all things. Come, O Wisdom; teach us.

Sung Response: "He Came Down" (from Cameroon)

He came down that we may have love. (Repeat three times.)

Hallelujah forevermore! O come, O come, Emmanuel! Hallelujah forevermore!

Narrative: In the Beginning Was the Word

In the beginning, the earth was formless and void, and darkness covered the face of the deep. But the beginning was not empty. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God, and all things came into being through Him. Truly, what has come into being in Him was life, and that life was the light to all people. It is a light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness will never overcome it. It is the true light that enlightens us all. Indeed, it is Wisdom, reaching from eternity to eternity with the glory of God. And we have seen that glory because the Word became flesh and lived among us, full of grace and truth. Come Lord Jesus, come.

Carol: "Incarnation"

Lighting the First Candle

The Second Lesson: Come, O Lord

O Lord, Adonai and Leader of the house of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the flame of a burning bush and at Sinai you gave him the law. Come, O Lord; redeem us.

Sung Response: “He Came Down” (from Cameroon)

He came down that we may have love. (Repeat three times.)

Hallelujah forevermore! O come, O come, Emmanuel! Hallelujah forevermore!

Narrative: The Promise of the Prophets

People long for strong leaders—leaders with vision and courage, with conviction and compassion. But one after another of Israel’s kings disappointed the people. One after another, they fell far short of the image of the ideal king; they fell far short of the image of God intended for their lives and their leadership. But still the prophets spoke, and still they promised that God would send a strong leader—an ideal king to deliver them, a Messiah to redeem them. And if the people knew anything about God it was that God keeps promises. So the people waited for this promise of the prophets to be fulfilled. They trusted that one day a child would be born for us, a son would be given to us; all authority would rest upon his shoulders; and he would be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Come Lord Jesus, come.

Carol: “Come to Jesus”

Lighting the Second Candle

The Third Lesson: Come, O Root of Jesse

O Root of Jesse, you stand as a sign to the peoples; before you rulers are silent and to you all nations shall pray. Come, O Root of Jesse; deliver us.

Sung Response: “He Came Down” (from Cameroon)

He came down that we may have love. (Repeat three times.)

Hallelujah forevermore! O come, O come, Emmanuel! Hallelujah forevermore!

Narrative: The Annunciation

An angel came to Mary and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you. Do not be afraid, for you have found favor with God. You will conceive in your womb and bear a son. He will be great. He will be holy. He will be called Son of God. He will scatter the proud and bring down the powerful from their thrones. He will lift up the lowly and fill the hungry with

good things.” Mary was more than bewildered, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” The angel replied, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called Son of God.”

Once it was discovered that Mary was with child, Joseph would have been well within his rights to break the engagement—either very publicly or with private concern for Mary’s honor. But he couldn’t go through with it. In a dream, an angel of the Lord said to him, “Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. The child she is carrying is holy. He will save his people from their sins.” And so it came to be that this Holy Child, the Son of God, could also trace his lineage through Joseph’s family line. Jesus the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Root of Jesse. Come Lord Jesus, come.

Carol: “Lo, How a Rose E’er Blooming” with “Rose of Bethlehem”
Lighting the Third Candle

The Fourth Lesson: Come, O Key of David

O Key of David and ruler of the house of Israel, you open and none can shut; you shut and none can open. Come, O Key of David; release the captives.

Sung Response: “He Came Down” (from Cameroon)

He came down that we may have love. (Repeat three times.)

Hallelujah forevermore! O come, O come, Emmanuel! Hallelujah forevermore!

Narrative: The Journey to Bethlehem

When the time was drawing near for Mary to give birth, the Emperor Augustus decreed that all should go to their hometowns to be registered. Mary went with Joseph to Bethlehem, the City of David, because Joseph was descended from the house and family of David. When they arrived, they searched in vain for a place to stay. It was crowded and hectic, and they were turned away because there was no room for them in the inn.

A stable was not the kind of place one would choose to bear a child, but it was warm and dry. And they were together. When the child was born, they wrapped him in bands of cloth and laid him in a manger. O little town of Bethlehem! You are by no means least among the clans of Judah, for from you shall come forth a ruler who is to shepherd Israel. His origin is from old,

from ancient of days. He is the root of Jesse, King David's greater Son. He is the Messiah who comes to release the captives. Come Lord Jesus, come.

Carol: "O Little Town of Bethlehem"

Lighting the Fourth Candle

The Fifth Lesson: Come, O Bright Morning Star

O Bright Morning Star, you are the splendor of eternal life; you are the dawning sun, the Sun of Righteousness. Come, O Bright Morning Star; enlighten us.

Sung Response: "He Came Down" (from Cameroon)

He came down that we may have love. (Repeat three times.)

Hallelujah forevermore! O come, O come, Emmanuel! Hallelujah forevermore!

Narrative: The Angel Proclamation

Now in that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. For see I am bringing you good news of great joy: for to you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign for you. You will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." Suddenly the heavens were afire with the glory and splendor of the Lord. A multitude of the heavenly host praised God and said, "Glory to God in the highest! Peace on earth; goodwill to all!" The Bright Morning Star has dawned on the earth. His light shines in the darkness of a lowly stable, and it shines in the darkness of our hearts. Glory to God in the highest! Come Lord Jesus, come.

Carol: "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing"

Lighting the Fifth Candle

The Sixth Lesson: Come, O King of the Nations

O King of the Nations, you are our desire. You are the Cornerstone, and you make all people one. Come, O King of the Nations, save those whom you formed of clay.

Sung Response: "He Came Down" (from Cameroon)

He came down that we may have love. (Repeat three times.)

Hallelujah forevermore! O come, O come, Emmanuel! Hallelujah forevermore!

Narrative: Rejoicing at the Manger

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds stood there for a moment lost in the wonder of it all. But then from afar, a lowly stable—filled with something quite holy—beckoned to them. The shepherds said to one another, "Let us go to Bethlehem to see this marvelous thing that has taken place!" So they left their fields and their flocks, and they made their way to the City of David. When they arrived, they found Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus just as the angel had said.

Then they knelt around that makeshift cradle and felt a joy welling up inside them that they did not fully understand. It was as if the very glory of the Lord pulsed through their veins, and they found it difficult to contain their excitement. They wanted to leap, dance, shout, and cry all at the same time. Indeed, they were in the presence of the great joy of our desiring, the One true King of all the nations and all the generations. Come Lord Jesus, come.

Carol: "Joy to the World"

Lighting the Sixth Candle

The Community Gathers Around the Lord's Table

The Seventh Lesson: Come, O Emmanuel

O Emmanuel, our Ruler and giver of the law, we await you, our Savior. Come, O Emmanuel; save us, O Lord our God.

Sung Response: "He Came Down" (from Cameroon)

He came down that we may have love. (Repeat three times.)

Hallelujah forevermore! O come, O come, Emmanuel! Hallelujah forevermore!

Narrative: God Is With Us

Many generations ago, the Prophet Isaiah proclaimed: "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which means, "God is with us." In due time, this promise was realized at the birth of a babe in the manger on this holy night. And through the ages faithful people have continued to call his name Emmanuel, God is with us, for we know the presence of God when we let Christ Child into our hearts.

But it is more than that. Jesus once said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” We know that to be true. When we come together as the Body of Christ, when we lift up our hearts in praise and worship, when we sing sacred songs and hear the Word of Life, when we break the bread and drink from the cup, we experience Christ’s presence among us. And we are not alone. The Christian community reaches through both time and space. When we gather together in Christ’s name, we gather with saints of old and brothers and sisters from afar. There is a reason we chose to include both the medieval monastic Christian witness and the contemporary global Christian witness in our service tonight. We wanted to experience with word and deed the mystery of Emmanuel—God with us all. Indeed, from age to age and nation to nation, we cry: Come, Lord Jesus, come.

The Great Thanksgiving

Our Great Thanksgiving Eucharistic Prayer this special night will be a sung call and response liturgy to a familiar tune. I will sing the “Leader” parts, I invite you to join in on the “People” parts, and we will all sing together at the end of each verse. Let us come to the table.

Leader: Lift your hearts and sing your praises to our Savior, God, and King.
People: On this sacred night we greet him, all our joyous thanks we bring.
All: Come and share the feast of heaven—God-with-us in wine and bread.

Leader: Hear the Good News of salvation: God has moved upon the earth,
People: From creation’s primal darkness to the Light of Jesus’ birth.
All: Come and share the feast of heaven—God-with-us in wine and bread.

Leader: Now the meal is spread before us, signs of grace and selfless love:
People: Body-broken, life-blood offered, sins forgiven from above.
All: Come and share the feast of heaven—God-with-us in wine and bread.

Leader: Holy Spirit, come upon us; fill our hearts, transform this place.
People: We are open to your leading, send us out to spread Christ’s grace.
All: Come and share the feast of heaven—God-with-us in wine and bread.

The Lord’s Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come; Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our sins as we forgive

those who sin against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Sharing the Bread and Cup

Please come forward, take a piece of bread, dip it into the cup and receive this gift.
Come feast! Come live!

Carol: “God With Us”

Prayer After Communion

Loving God, with great thanksgiving for this holy meal we offer: our lips to be the hopeful voice of Christ, our hands to reach out in his name, our feet to walk in his footsteps, our bodies to be a living sacrifice for you. Take us. Empower us. Use us. Amen.

The Community Goes Out into the World

Lighting the Christ Candle

On Christmas Eve, we proclaim in a very visual way that Christ is the Light of the World—the light that shines in the darkness, the light that can never be overcome by the powers of this world. Each candle burning here proclaims that truth. But now we light the Christ candle, our chosen symbol for the Light of God that has come to us in Christ Jesus. And from this one candle, we will each light our own candles. Receive the Light of Christ. Let it burn as a symbol of His light that shines in you.

Receiving the Light of Christ

Carol: “Silent Night”

Benediction: “Tomorrow, I Will Come”

Throughout this service, we have been walking (sometimes literally!) in the footsteps of our medieval brothers who gave us the O Antiphons. It has been a glorious journey! But we have one more blessing to receive from those brothers. They gave us a subtle message in the ordering of the O Antiphons. For if you start with the seventh Antiphon, Come O Emmanuel and work your way back through the journey taking the first letter of each name for Christ, you get this Latin phrase: *Ero cras*, “Tomorrow I will come.” This is Christ’s promise.

Speaking to us through the ages, ringing out across the dark skies, he says to you and to me,
“Tomorrow I will come.” So go in peace on this Holy Night with a prayer of invocation on
your hearts. Come, Lord Jesus, come.