

Second Sunday of Advent
The Heart of Christmas
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Our gathering today is a gathering that is larger than usual, because today after we partake in communion together, we will go into our congregational meeting and vote on a very important issue - whether you wish to be dismissed from the PCUSA and join the new Presbyterian denomination called ECO.

Session and I have made this recommendation and it is now up to you the body of Christ, to decide if this is what you want to do.

We have discussed this for many months, and created many documents for you to read. I hope that you have reviewed these and that you all will vote responsibly aware of the issues.

And I am ready for this to be over – as I am sure many of you are too.

But before we vote friends we *must* worship. We must look up and seek God's face and his presence. First things first. Because...

Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

I know one thing for sure that we are all unified about.

We all want – God to guide us in this process that his will might be done.

However we do have different perspectives however on what his will might be.

You know the word Protestant has that little word “protest” in it.

Protestants are protestors—not always agreeing, discussing, voting, splitting, joining. What we are doing today is nothing new. It all started back in the 1500's when Luther nailed his 95 thesis on the Wittenburg door and started the Protestant reformation.

So because this is such an important day, I want this time, usually dedicated to the sermon, to be a time of asking Jesus to come into our midst as we anticipate this whole process that will follow.

Our theme for Advent is the stories behind the carols and there is one carol that is very relevant for today. It is actually the oldest Christmas Carol of all.

The Christmas Carol is “**O Come O Come Emmanuel**”. It was originally written by a monk or a priest only 800 years after the birth of Christ. The author of this carol had a very astute knowledge of both the Old and New Testaments because you will see as you sing it, that each verse talks about how the Old Testament Scripture is fulfilled in the coming of Jesus.

For the people in the Dark Ages – few of whom read or had access to the Bible – this carol was incredibly valuable in teaching them how the OT and NT fit together in terms of Jesus being the fulfillment of many prophecies. Because it brought the story of Christ to life in this

way during hundreds of years of ignorance and darkness, it is one of the most important songs of the Christian faith.

A man called John Mason Neele – a brilliant man who could speak over 20 languages and had a passion for helping the poor and doing ministry– was the one who translated it into English in about 1800.

The fact that it was originally sung in Latin, and then translated into scores of languages and today is embraced by every Christian denomination in the world makes this carol very important and it is also one that unifies all of us today in the name of Jesus.

Emmanuel means “God with us”
Here is the first verse:

***O Come O Come Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
Who mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee O Israel***

Friends, the church is the new Israel. Sometimes we are held captive, or exiled by our own inability to see and know God’s will. One day, when Jesus appears, all differences will be reconciled. We will know the truth and it will set us free. We won’t see in a glass dimly anymore...we will see Jesus face to face.
And we will rejoice....

Let’s sing this first verse together...

Lord Jesus, come and rescue us from our brokenness that divides us, and exiles us from one another. Set us free in the light of your appearance. We pray in Jesus’ name...AMEN

2. The next verse is as follows:

***O Come thou Dayspring come and
cheer
Our spirits by thine Advent here,
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And deaths dark shadows put to flight***
.

Dayspring means the dawn, the first light of day. Zechariah in the NT – John the Baptist’s father - uses it when referring to Jesus...

Ever watch a sunrise?



After the darkest night you can see the sun coming up, illuminating the outline of the hills. And as the sun gets higher the rays disperse over the top of the hill and bring clarity and focus to all that is around; opening up a new world that in the gloom and shadows we just couldn't see before. That's who Jesus is. That's what he does. That's why he is called "the first light of dawn" – The Dayspring that illuminates the beauty around us and cheers up our spirits with new vision and direction.

As we sing this next verse together, see that Dayspring, that first light of dawn, coming up over those dark foreboding hills in your life – whatever they may be - and illuminating your surroundings so that your spirit can be cheered with new possibility and greater clarity for whatever challenges you are facing personally, and for the challenge in front of all of us today to be the church he is calling us to be...

Let's sing together...

O Lord, come and be our Dayspring. Cheer our hearts today and illuminate our minds to see all that you want us to see. Amen

3. Here's the third verse:

O Come thou wisdom from on high

And order all thing far and nigh

To us the path of knowledge show

And cause us in her ways to go

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel

Shall come to thee O Israel

There's no explanation needed for this one. It's a prayer for guidance and direction. We need that today. We need God to order our steps and show us the path to walk on. Lets sing together making this a prayer for our proceedings today...(SING)

Lord God...come and bring us wisdom and cause us this day to be on the path you are calling us to be on as a church and as individuals. We pray in Jesus' name...

The Final Verse:

O come Desire of nations, bind

In one the hearts of all mankind

Bid thou our sad divisions cease

And be thyself our King of peace

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, shall come to Thee O Israel.

One thing I must say as your Pastor and that is this. Based on this vote, regardless of which way it goes, we will lose some of you – one way or the other

As I said before, this is nothing new in the Protestant tradition. Historically we are constantly splitting, and re-uniting, and dividing again. However, the real sin will be if we are divided in our hearts against one another – regardless of the issues or where we decide to worship in the end.

In other words today, if you are holding onto animosity, or bitterness against another person because of what we have been through here as a congregation in these last 18 months, I beg of you to let that go.

Pray for the ability to forgive and to seek reconciliation or to ask for forgiveness.

May Jesus Christ, the desire of us all, bind us together as Christians so that whatever happens, and wherever we go from here, we might do so at peace with Christ our King of peace, and do so being at peace in our hearts with one another.

Let's sing this last verse....(IMAGE OF BREAD AND CUP)



Lord God, as we move into communion now we pray for unity and a removal of any bitterness or resentment in our hearts. Come and bind us together as we come to your table, and may we truly partake in remembrance of you who forgave us freely and completely. Set these elements apart from a common to a sacred use that you might glorified...O Come O Come Emmanuel....Amen