

Call To Worship Psalm 89:1-4 Common English Bible
I will sing of the LORD's loyal love forever.

I will proclaim your faithfulness with my own mouth from one generation to the next.
That's why I say, "Your loyal love is rightly built—forever!

You establish your faithfulness in heaven."

You said, "I made a covenant with my chosen one; I promised my servant David:

'I will establish your offspring forever;

I will build up your throne from one generation to the next.'"

Prayer of Invocation

To you Lord, we lift up our heads, hearts and hands in prayer.

We put our trust in you, believing that your word is true.

You promised hope to Israelites and you kept your promise.

You promised hope in the coming of your son and he was hope for the world.

You promised hope to the early church and that hope was not denied.

You promise hope to us and we pray for your continued faithfulness.

**Lord, we pray for you to pour on your love so it fills our lives
and splashes over on everyone around you.**

Fill us with your joy and peace as we go through this busy time of year.

Keep our minds focused on you, our hearts filled with you and ours outstretched for you.

Amen.

The Word Luke 21:25-36 (NRSV)

"There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in a cloud' with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."**

Then he told them a parable: "Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with overindulgence and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.

Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Living the Word

This morning we have lit the first candle of Advent on the Advent Wreath. There are four candles, one is pink and that is the candle of Joy. We will light that one after we have journeyed a couple of weeks. That is the third candle to be lit on the third Sunday of Advent.

When we get to the fourth purple candle, which is the color of Royalty, it is the candle of Love and will be lit on the 18th of December this year, the fourth Sunday in Advent. Then on Christmas eve we will light the Christ Candle in the center. Next week, is the Christmas Pageant, and the second candle is the candle of Peace??? Obviously God wants us to explore what our living together in peace might mean for those who may not know peace in their lives. That often can mean working together to accomplish something beautiful. A Christmas Pageant can be just that.

As for today the first candle of Advent is the candle of Hope. We have much to be hopeful about. Even in our times of crisis and traumas. Christ was born for this – to give us hope in our lives. It is something to hold on when you think you are sinking into the muck and mire of this world. A loving God is ever-present with us. Christ came to remind us of that hope and to give us salvation beyond the muck and mire.

Our Bishop, Hee-Soo Jung, came in 2012 with a message of hope for us. He has shared his vision for the Wisconsin Conference in three parts: Abundance, Recruitment and Gifts. His hope for us is to live into our abundance, not focusing on what we do not have, but on all that we have when we share it with the community, within and outside of this church. He has given us hope as a church because he believes that HUMC has many exciting things yet to happen, and that we need to tell others so they also can be a part of the goodness here, by recruiting. Then his third hope for our church and all of the other 470 churches in Wisconsin is to find and know our gifts, so all can be a part of the building of the Kingdom of God.

So we are in Advent. This is a time of preparing our hearts for the Coming of Christ. The songs of Christmas are already being played on the radio and in the stores. But technically Christmas doesn't begin until December 25 and we need some time to prepare for that, so today I want to begin our journey with some hymns of Advent, and preparation. As you sing today and every day, I invite you to think about what you are singing, paying attention to the words and I am going to also give you a bit of history. If you want to follow along in the hymnal, I am beginning with # 196. All but the last hymn this morning including the choir anthem (which will be sung next week) are all from the section of the hymnal entitled "Promised Coming."

In 1730–1760: First Great Awakening took place in Great Britain and North America. The First Awakening (or The Great Awakening) was a Christian revitalization movement that swept Protestant Europe and British America, and especially the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s, leaving a permanent impact on American religion. It resulted from powerful preaching that gave listeners a sense of deep personal revelation of their need of salvation by Jesus Christ. Pulling away from ritual and ceremony, the Great Awakening made Christianity intensely personal to the average person by fostering a deep sense of spiritual conviction and redemption, and by encouraging introspection and a commitment to a new standard of personal morality.

1729–1735: Charles Wesley and John Wesley begin Methodism in England. The Wesleys published several small collections of hymn texts that were affordable for a wider number of people. They were usually on themes associated with a particular season of the Christian year or the sacraments. These volumes offered a way to spread Methodist theology and enhance the personal devotional life of those in the Society. The collections also provided a quantity of songs to sing together when the Society gathered.

#196 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

Interestingly enough, this hymn, written by Charles Wesley, appeared in an American Methodist hymnal in 1847, nearly 30 years before it was included in a British Methodist hymnal. It has the quality of a petition—a prayer that implores Christ to be among us. He also draws upon another cumulative technique, the repetition of a single word for effect. In this case it is the word "born" which appears four times. Each time "born" is sung, an aspect of Jesus' mission to a troubled world is revealed: "Born to set thy people free"; "Born thy people to deliver"; "Born a child and yet a king"; "Born to reign in us forever."

While many hymns of the Advent and Christmas season recount parts of the narrative of the Christmas story, Charles Wesley offers us a poetic theological discourse that allows us to apply the story of Christmas to our lives.

Although we live in a different time than Charles Wesley, the longings of people's hearts are just as deep. We long for security, love, relationships, meaning. To those who open themselves up to its message, this hymn identifies with that longing at the deepest levels of our existence. Where there is no longing, there can be little meaning. Hope is central to Christian experience.

And where will our longing, our hopeful waiting lead us? Where is the ultimate home of our hope? In the final line Wesley takes us there: "Raise us to thy glorious throne." For countless Christians around the world, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" signals the beginning of Advent. The ages of the hymns we will now look at for the most part are ancient. I will give you dates as we go. Also notable to these Advent hymns is their irregular rhythms and haunting melodies, which has some to do with their age. Many were written in Latin and were sung as chants.

#211 O Come O Come Emmanuel

The text of O Come, O Come, Emmanuel is based on the biblical prophesy from Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel." The author of the carol is unknown, though the music seems to have been included in a 15th Century French processional for Franciscan nuns, though it too may have origins in 8th Century Gregorian Chant. Our present day English translation from Latin, was written by John Neale in the mid-19th century.

During the nineteenth century there were a number of Anglican ministers and scholars, such as John Neale, who developed a keen interest in rediscovering and translating into English many of the ancient Greek and German hymns. John Neale, born in London, England, on January 24, 1818, undoubtedly did more than any other person to make available the rich heritage of Greek and German hymns.

The word Emmanuel means 'deliverer, in this case ransom for Israel, who were captives of the earthly kingdom of Rome. But also for us as we are captives of our culture and society, in need of ransom to be free to follow God's Will. Verse two introduces Christ as Wisdom, showing us the 'path of knowledge'. Wisdom is often spoken of in female language, and here we see it as 'she' "causes us in her ways to go."

Verse three speaks of the "Lord of Might" which is from Exodus 19:16 and in verse four the tree referred to is the family tree of Jesus, to which rulers have fallen in the past – such as Pharaoh fell to God through Moses. Throughout time the people of Israel have had many trials, but the faith, which we now experience as Christian through Jesus has continued.

During Advent this year, we will be singing part of this hymn each week with our Advent Candle lighting. Today we have hope knowing of God's deliverance. As to the antiphons, written to supplement the singing, we will leave them for another year...

#184 Of the Fathers Love Begotten

This hymn also translated by John Neale from Latin, is based on the Latin poem *Corde natus* by the Roman poet Aurelius Prudentius. The ancient poem was translated and paired with a medieval plainchant melody *Divinum mysterium – divine mystery*. An early version of this chant appears in manuscript form as early as the 10th century. Plainchant or plainsong is a body of chants (think Gregorian chant) used in the liturgies of the Catholic Church. Plainsong is monophonic, meaning that it consists of a single, unaccompanied melodic line. It generally has a more free rhythm than the metered rhythm of later Western music of which it is now been set.

In 2006, Paul Caldwell and Sean Ivory wrote a choral piece "Hope for Resolution", overlapping the classic hymn with a traditional Swahili melody. The added words from the Zulu language are a South African Freedom Song. Thus the words that overlap are "Of a Father's love begotten, ere the worlds began to be" overlapped with the words "Nation, do not cry."

It becomes a powerfully beautiful continuation of the song we sing to God, who is the Divine Mystery of hope for us. We cannot understand even with the Wisdom of Christ, how God inspires people through the centuries of time, to create greatness, both ancient and new, but as the hymn says "God is alpha and omega" – which is Greek for first and last; God is evermore and evermore.

Do you see the line in the second verse: "let no tongue on earth be silent, every voice in concert ring." There is that witness thing again. I admit I love to sing, especially the hymns. The ones I know well, I sing all of the words without them printed before me. If you see me as I drive through this season, I will probably be belting them out, but only to myself.

Here at church I am willing to sing out as long as you will join me and I don't have to have the microphone still on. Our song can also be a witness to others – but that means risking ourselves so others can hear our songs. In the car I admit that I have already gone beyond the preparations of Advent and have jumped right into the anticipation of Christmas by singing the Christmas hymns along with the CD and radio. So also I thought we might end our service today with one step closer to Christmas.

#234 O Come All Ye Faithful

'O Come All Ye Faithful' is one of the most famous Christmas carols, which was originally written in Latin and called 'Adeste Fideles'. Today this song is commonly attributed to the Englishman, John Wade, in 1751, but the origins and meaning of 'Adeste Fideles' have historically been surrounded in controversy as it has been attributed to a number of different writers through the centuries.

John Francis Wade is considered the most likely composer, since the earliest manuscript still in existence shows the tune and lyrics written by him. This was published as early as 1743. Wade was a Catholic layman who fled from England to France, fearing religious persecution, and earned a living by copying and selling plain chant music at a major Catholic college in France.

The original text consisted of four Latin verses, and it was with these that the hymn was originally published. In performance verses are often omitted, either because the hymn is too long in its entirety or because the words are unsuitable for the day on which they are sung. Today we will only sing 1-4 leaving verse 6 for Christmas Eve, when we will sing it again.

It was originally written in Latin and verse one is printed in the Latin just below the English. How many of you learned it in Latin? I did in third or fourth grade, in the public school. It is most of the Latin I know. I invite you to go down to the refrain and read the Latin with me. Ve-ni-te-a-do-re-mus, ve-ni-te-a-do-re-mus, ve-ni-te-a-do-re-mus, Do-mi-num. Now you know how to read and speak some latin!

Verse two gives us the thought of the one true God coming to earth to be born as a human, in the way a human is. Verse one names Jesus as the King of the Angels and when we sing verse three, we are inviting and even imploring the choir of angels and all of the citizens of heaven to sing, sing in exultation or jubilation.

Verse four is very human, as it speaks of the shepherds, leaving their sheep behind to see the birth miracle. And then our sermon title 'We too would thither.' Thither is to move in the direction of that place. We also would move in the direction of Christmas and Jesus' birth. When I sing this hymn I feel that gathering of all of humanity in the direction of God.

The lighting of our advent candle of Hope, was followed with a prayer, which I would re-emphasize again: "Loving God, as we enter this Advent Season, we open all of the dark places of our lives and memories to the healing light of Christ. Show us the creative power of hope. Prepare our hearts to be transformed by you, that we may walk in the light of Christ. Amen."