

O Come, Emmanuel!
Phil Congdon

Christmas is a season anchored in history. The coming of Christ was first foretold the day Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3.15), at the dawn of creation, and through signs and revelation progressively came into focus throughout the Old Testament. The New Testament chronicled Jesus' birth, along with His ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension. The Good News that the Savior of the world has come to earth is *the story* of Christmas, and it has rung out ever since.

The songs of Christmas beautifully proclaim the Savior's birth, and one of the oldest carols exhibits the Good News as it echoed through many centuries. We know it by the title *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, but it is actually a collection of spiritual truth reflected by various cultures and periods of history. For example, its origin is in the medieval Roman Church of the 12th century – possibly earlier!

It began as a series of Antiphons – short statements sung at the beginning of a psalm or the reading of Mary's *Magnificat* during the Advent season. Each of these Antiphons greeted the Savior with one of the many titles ascribed to Him in Scripture: *Emmanuel*, *Lord of Might*, *Rod of Jesse*, *Dayspring*, *Key of David*. These were combined with a haunting 'Plainsong' or Chant – an early form of singing in the church.



Fast-forward to the 19th century, and an Anglican minister named John M. Neale, who along with others took on the task of translating ancient hymns from Latin and Greek into English. Neale, born exactly 200 years ago this year, penned the words that we sing today. The references to Christ are grounded in Old Testament prophecy, and look forward to His future return:

Emmanuel – The prophet Isaiah prophesied that the coming Savior would be “God with us” (Isa. 7.14), and the angel repeated this to Joseph (Matt. 1.23). Israel longed for Messiah, who would ransom them from their captivity. Tragically, when He did come ‘to His own’ people, they ‘did not receive Him’ (Jn. 1.11).

Lord of Might – The Lord gave the Law on Mt. Sinai with awesome signs and wonders (Ex. 19.16), and His people looked forward to Him coming. Today, His people – both Jews and Gentiles, look forward to Him coming a second time, in power and glory.

Rod of Jesse – Isaiah prophesied, *A shoot will come up from the stump (or rod) of Jesse* (11.1), pointing to another prophecy, that the coming Messiah would *reign on David's throne and over his kingdom* (Isa. 9.7). The Book of Revelation foretells this rule (2.27; 12.5; 19.15), and we look forward to it today.

Dayspring – Literally “sun-rising,” points to the coming ‘light of the world’ (see Num. 24.17; Mal. 4.2). A heavenly light announced His birth; he is ‘the Light’ (John 1.4-9). His light has shone in our hearts, and He came *to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death* (Luke 1.78-79).

Key of David – This expression, first recorded in Isa. 22.22, echoes Isa. 9.6: The coming Messiah would be heir to the throne of David, and would reign forever and ever. Every believer looks forward to the ‘blessed hope’ of the coming Millennial Reign of King Jesus (Rev. 20.1-6)!

What a blessed truth – Emmanuel *has come*...and what a blessed hope – Emmanuel is coming. Celebrate our Emmanuel this Christmas season!

