

Texts: Proverbs 8:1-4, 22-31; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37

This year Advent calls us to slow down and take a breath. It seems like even more than in the recent past, time is just racing forward. This year, our Advent theme is O Come, O Come Emmanuel. We will sing verses from that hymn each week of Advent and reflect each week on what we are truly asking God to do when we ask God to come into our lives. Because Advent is not about counting the shopping days until Christmas. Advent is not about 24 different kinds of chocolate behind the doors of the Advent calendar. And Advent is not about nostalgia for past holidays when it seemed like everyone was happy together.

Advent is the moment right before dawn when it seems like the night is at its longest. In Advent we take stock of where we are and what our world is like and we long for that light to come. We long for dawn to break, for the sun to light up the eastern sky. Advent is about longing, about yearning for the light of Christ to break into the darkness of the world and the darkness of our lives.

The words of the hymn O Come, O Come Emmanuel were probably written 1,200 years ago and set to music about a thousand years ago. These are ancient prayers. They are called antiphons, a Latin word that means “words shared back and forth.” To read a psalm or a prayer antiphonally means that one group reads the first part of the verse and the other group reads the second part. We’ve done that on occasion with the psalms. These particular antiphons were spoken or sung by the monks at Vespers, the service of evening prayer. These antiphons were spoken or sung on the 7 days before Christmas Eve, to express the longing of the church for the coming of Christ. Each of them addresses an

ancient and prophetic name of Jesus. They direct our Advent worship toward Jesus. They express our own longing for Jesus to come to us.

Open your hymnal to # 257 and read the second verse of the hymn along with me:

O come, O Wisdom, from on high,

Embracing all things far and nigh:

In strength and beauty come and stay;

Teach us your will and guide our way.

In this morning's first reading from the book of Proverbs, the figure of Holy Wisdom addresses us directly, inviting "all who live" to hear her call. Then she tells us that she was there in the beginning with God at creation, beside God as a master worker, delighting in everything that God created. These verses may remind you of the beginning of the gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him..." (John 1:1-3a)

We are accustomed to hearing Jesus Christ called the Word of God, but we are not as familiar with Jesus Christ as the Wisdom of God. But the ancient church did identify Jesus that way, using these two scripture passages and others, specifically Paul's letter to the Corinthians where he calls Christ the "power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24) and his letter to the Colossians: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created..." (Col. 1:15-16)

The dictionary definition of wisdom is this: knowledge that is true or right coupled with just judgment. Wisdom is not the same as intelligence. Intelligence implies that you have some kind of innate capacity for learning, that it's something you were born with.

Wisdom is not the same as expertise. Expertise implies that you have studied a subject thoroughly, or that you have practiced and honed a skill. Wisdom is deep insight. Wisdom is the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. Wisdom points to right action, to truthful living. God's wisdom can be fully seen in Jesus, through whom creation was ordered and in whom God lived in all God's fulness.

This ancient antiphon asks for Wisdom to teach us God's will and show us God's way. No matter how smart we are, no matter how gifted we are, we all have a tendency to wander off in the wrong direction. There is much in the world that distracts us from God's way. There are many voices that compete for our attention. There are many shiny lights that beckon toward a Christmas that doesn't have much to do with Christ at all.

Our Advent longing is for Holy Wisdom to guide us. We long for a world where wisdom is honored. A world where politicians keep their word. A world where war and violence give way to peace. A world where everyone can find purposeful and fulfilling work. A world where every home is a place of love and encouragement. A world where there is no more sexual harassment, no more greedy grasping, no more destruction of the environment, no more racist stereotypes. A world where every person has enough to eat. A world where the light of Christ shines in the darkness.

Today we begin our Advent journey, and we pray these ancient prayers. We pray that God will come into our lives, teaching us this way of wisdom, illuminating God's path for each of us. O Come, O Come Emmanuel.