

Introduction

As the air turns colder, the glow of lights shine warmth and snow begins to fall, we anticipate the Christmas season. As Christians, the season of Advent guides us through the four weeks leading toward Christmas and the remembrance of Jesus' debut on earth. Moving closer and closer to the holidays often brings up a variation of feelings for each of us. Some of us love this time of year, while others dread it. The joy and hope of the season can stand in stark contrast against the pain and struggle our world continues to experience. We'll be using Christmas carols, and the stories and scriptures they're rooted in, to walk toward Christmas. This week, we'll consider "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" and its acknowledgement of God's presence with us throughout the current joy of His Son's life here on earth and the continued longing for His coming again.

Discussion

1. Start by sharing your personal response to the Christmas season. Do you tend to excitedly anticipate the holiday or struggle with joy because of painful experiences and losses?
2. Read Isaiah 5:21-25. How had Israel rejected God's instructions? What had they done? What consequences typically follow disobeying the guidance of an authority figure? What does Israel need to do to restore a right relationship with God?
3. Israel was anticipating the Messiah, Jesus' coming as a fulfillment of God's promise to make a way for the whole world to know and be in relationship with Him, despite their rebellion. Think of a time you were rescued – when you needed someone from the outside to come in and change your situation. Share how you felt as you waited for help and how you felt once it came.

Think About It

During Advent, we anticipate the coming of our Savior. He's the hero of our story who changes everything with the most miraculous plot twist. The wait for His coming was filled with expectation of hope, newness and redemption from the place Israel found itself in because of its rebellion. Jesus' life, death and resurrection was a part of God's process of repairing the chance for a relationship with Him. Because He came, we have hope even within the brokenness and pain of our world. We didn't deserve a rescuer, but God was gracious to send His Son to us, to be among us, engage with us, love us, and finally save us. During Advent, we continue to anticipate Jesus' coming, and during Christmas, we continue celebrating God's faithfulness to His people. In the midst of whatever the emotions we experience during the holidays and throughout the year, we have this hope and joy as we continue to wait for Jesus' future coming. As we think toward the significance of Jesus' birth, let our hearts longingly sing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" once again.

Do Something

1. The Christmas carol "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" points to God's presence with us who live somewhere between joyful and sad at Christmastime and during the year. Spend some time asking God to refresh your joy and reverence for the gift of His Son and to deepen your longing for and expectation of His return.
2. Ask a friend how they're holding up as Christmas approaches. If the holidays are difficult for them, listen. Share in their longing for something renewed and encourage each other to frame those feelings in light of God's grace, faithfulness and hope.
3. How do the truths that Jesus came and is coming again change the way you live day to day? Whether it's a shift in perspective, priority or action, let the grace and love of Jesus be something that impacts your life.