

ADVENT SUNDAY 2025

It is one of the best tunes and best loved, Advent hymns: 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel' – No 11 in the not-so-new English Hymnal! Verse 3 reads:

"O come, O come, Adonai, Who in thy glorious majesty, From Sinai's mountain, clothed with awe, Gavest thy folk the ancient law."

The rich Old Testament imagery is so prominent in the coming Sundays because we are being asked to look more deeply at the Christ figure, his identity, his coming again as our Lord and Messiah.

Those of you who follow a daily prayer lectionary or connect via your C of E app, will know that today's chosen 'O Antiphon' (one of seven) falls on December 18th so, call it 'artistic license' on my part! The great prophets always changed the tenses and times, didn't they, in order that we could focus on God's future promises, in order that we could look forward, be expectant, wait for greater things to come?

Mountains are important, too. Isaiah speaks words of invitation, reminding us of the Law of Moses from Mount Sinai, inviting us to come and join an expedition which will change our lives for ever:

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."

I hinted last week that these Advent Antiphons were sung at evening prayer since the earliest centuries – simple plainsong to chant the simplest of prayers. We would call them ‘arrow prayers’ because there is a sense of urgency, a sense that the end is coming, and that judgment is near:

Come, Adonai and save us. Amen.

I like prayers like that don’t you? They don’t ramble on trying to tell God everything that is happening or everything that we want to see God ‘do’...in case He might be sleeping!

No, we are His Advent people wanting our Lord and God to come and save us, to be so much a part of our everyday lives that in another great hymn we shall sing tonight, we will exclaim: “O Come quickly! Come, Lord, come!”

We don’t want to drown in a sea of distracting adverts and tinsel in the days ahead; instead we want to explore these great Advent titles which we can mirror through the eyes of artists, writers and composers.

I found by accident last week, some lovely resources on their website, from the Diocese of Coventry. I have put one of their 24 tiny Advent poems on this week’s E-News: “Advent is the hush in the theatre between the house lights going down and the curtain going up.” It is hard to explain sometimes – this feeling of quiet expectation mixed with reverence and awe. Think of Moses and the burning bush! That feeling of wanting to hide and wanting to be right in the middle of such a dramatic encounter with God. Most mountain top

experiences **are** unforgettable – unless you have only ever lived and stayed in Suffolk, of course!

In today's Gospel St Matthew says, "Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming" ...

This wonderful new season is all about absence and presence, knowing and unknowing, watching and waiting, with God's whisper of assurance and love all around us. The contemporary American hymn writer and composer Marty Haugen put it like this: 'Come, let us bow before the God who made us, let every heart be opened to the Lord, for we are all the people of his hand.'

Today's antiphon reminds us of a thread that runs through the whole of Scripture: the thread of God's action in leading people from slavery to freedom, intertwined with his faithful care in good times and bad. God's claim to be the mighty Lord, with authority over the people simply because he is as he is, finds fullest expression throughout Old Testament history, story-telling and prophecy. How shall we respond?

Our Advent book is quite direct and invites us to ask:

"How might God be getting your attention – coming close to you – in these days of Advent? Will you turn aside – or come close?" My own question to you all is similar:

Will you be drawn to the light of Christ, shining in the darkness... or, to His still, small voice which will for ever resound in our hearts and lives?