

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins re-lease us; let us find our rest in Thee.
Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear de-sire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a king
Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring.
By our God's eternal Spirit rule in all our hearts alone
By Thine all sufficient merit, come and occupy Thy throne.¹

In our Christmas series this year we are going to focus on the great biblical themes in some of the traditional Christmas Carols. We will look at "Silent Night," "O, Little Town of Bethlehem," "Joy to the World," and presently "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus."

I doubt that there were many people in Israel who hoped for the birth of the Christ or the Messiah. Job hoped for the Redeemer saying, "I know that my Redeemer Lives."² Abraham hoped for the Redeemer. In the gospel of John, Jesus declared that "Abraham rejoiced to see My day."³ King David hoped in the coming Messiah and prophesied about him.⁴ So too did the prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel hope in the coming Messiah.⁵

There were people who desired the strength and consolation and redemption that the Savior would bring. But sadly throughout most of Israel's history there were many whose hopes were not set on Christ. In fact when Jesus was born and the Magi came looking for him the religious leaders of the time seemed unfazed. They knew from the Scriptures that the savior would be born in Bethlehem and they revealed this to the Magi, but they themselves never went to investigate!

Herod wanted to see the new born King, but only to kill him. The world was and is a dark place. Christmas will come and go this year and sadly there will be

¹ Charles Wesley

² Job 19:25

³ John 8:56

⁴ Psalm 22

⁵ Isaiah 53:4-6,; Jeremiah 23:5, 6; Daniel 7:13, 14

people who will never think about Jesus Christ and they need him to release them from their sins and fears.

We are going to read about two people who would have sung, "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" with all of their hearts. One is a man named Simeon and the other is a woman named Anna. And the event we will read took place forty days after Jesus was born.

And when eight days were completed for the circumcision of the Child, His name was called JESUS, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.

²² Now when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were completed, they brought Him to Jerusalem to present *Him* to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every male who opens the womb shall be called holy to the LORD"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, "A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."
(Luke 2:21-24)

Luke wrote about Christ's circumcision and Mary's purification to remind us that from the very beginning Jesus fulfilled the law of God. You can see the word "law" repeated in verses 22, 23 and 24. Why is this so important to understand? The answer is that Jesus fulfilling the law in his obedience and then his bearing the penalty of our breaking the law is the basis for our salvation.

In the last verse of our Christmas carol we read "By Thine all sufficient merit, come and occupy Thy throne." By the merits of Jesus Christ he will rule the world in the coming kingdom. And by trusting in his merits alone we also by grace are allowed to rule with him.⁶

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.
(Luke 2:25)

In our song we sing "Israel's strength and consolation." Simeon was waiting for the Messiah to come so that all oppression and sorrow and grief would be no more. This is the only place in the Bible where Simeon is mentioned.

⁶ Revelation 5:9, 10

We are not told what kind of work he did or where he lived. But we are told the most important thing about him—he believed God. The most important thing about us is not what we do for a living or where we live or what high society we may be a part of. What is most significant about us is that we believe God.

Simeon was a seemingly insignificant man, but not to God. God knew Simeon and loved him. And he gave Simeon special revelation that he would not die before he had seen the Savior.

And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ.
(Luke 2:26)

I can imagine that every day Simeon would go to the Temple and think “Is it this man, Lord?” “Is that the one to redeem Israel?” And then one day it happened. An ordinary man and his wife came to the Temple with their new born son to offer a sacrifice. It was a scene repeated thousands of times with other families. But this time God said to Simeon, “This couple's baby is the Redeemer. Go and see him.” Can you imagine Simeon's excitement?

So he came by the Spirit into the temple.
And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, ²⁸ he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: ²⁹ “Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word;
(Luke 2:27-29)

Simeon did not look at the outward appearance of this poor family. He did not say “But God, how can this baby be the Messiah?” He did not question God and say “I expected someone more important, more royal.” Simeon believed God and introduced himself to Joseph and Mary and asked to hold their baby and then praised God.

“Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word;
³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation
³¹ Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples,
³² A light to *bring* revelation to the Gentiles,
And the glory of Your people Israel.”
(Luke 2:29-32)

Simeon's prayer of praise is short, but it shows he knew the Scriptures and believed them. When he said "my eyes have seen Your salvation" the Greek word translated "salvation" really means "the one fit to save." Simeon understood that the baby in his arms was the only person capable of fully obeying God. And he knew the Redeemer was for all people and not just for Israel. This was stated in the Scriptures. God revealed this to Abraham.

Now the LORD had said to Abram:

"Get out of your country,
From your family
And from your father's house,
To a land that I will show you.
² I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.
³ I will bless those who bless you,
And I will curse him who curses you;
And in you all the families of the
earth shall be blessed."
(Genesis 12:1-3)

In Galatians 3:8, the apostle Paul identifies these words as the gospel preached to Abraham. Isaiah knew as well that the Messiah would be the savior of all people. Here are the words of the Messiah in prophecy.

"And now the Lord says,
Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,
To bring Jacob back to Him,
So that Israel is gathered to Him[a]
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord,
And My God shall be My strength),
⁶ Indeed He says,
'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'"
(Isaiah 49:5, 6)

The Redeemer is for all people—for you and for me. In our song we sang "Israel's strength and consolation, Hope of all the earth Thou art." Let's return to Luke.

And Joseph and His mother marveled at those things which were spoken of Him.
34 Then Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His mother, "Behold, this *Child* is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be spoken against **35** (yes, a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."
(Luke 2:33-35)

Scripture tells us that Jesus will be a stone of stumbling for all those who reject him.⁷ They will fall and perish. But all who believe in Christ will be raised up to share his glory.⁸ And Simeon sees that Mary's grief will be overwhelming when her first born is put to death. But Jesus will one day reveal the thoughts and hearts of everyone when he judges the world.⁹ Simeon could have sung "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus." So too could a woman named Anna.

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; **37** and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years,^[1] who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. **38** And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord,^[1] and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.
(Luke 2:36-38)

Here was an old and widowed woman. But here she is in the Temple every day worshipping God and serving others. And as Simeon stands there holding the baby Jesus, Anna walks by and instantly knows that this baby is the long awaited Redeemer. And she told everyone she knew who also hoped for redemption.

What does "redemption" mean? It means "to buy again." In biblical times this term was used most often for the act of freeing a slave. A slave would be set

⁷ 1 Peter 2:8

⁸ Colossians 3:1-3

⁹ Acts 17:30, 31

free if someone would pay the price for his or her redemption and freedom. A powerful example of this is in the Old Testament book of Hosea.

God often described Israel as His bride and Israel was very often unfaithful to God. But God promises that although most of Israel is unfaithful, He would redeem a remnant of Israel back to His love. So He tells the prophet Hosea to marry a woman who was a prostitute. And He states that even though Hosea marries her she will be unfaithful to him.

So Hosea marries here and she is unfaithful, so much so that at her lowest point she is being sold at a slave auction. But God tells Hosea to love her again and buy her back. Can you image Hosea's broken heart as he sees his wife used and abused and up for sale? Can you imagine his wife and her shame and guilt? But Hosea redeemed her and loved her again. Without Christ we too are up for sale in a wicked world. But God redeemed us through Jesus Christ. The apostle Peter wrote,

knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, *like silver or gold*, from your aimless conduct *received by tradition from your fathers*, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot
(1 Peter 1:18, 19)

This is what Simeon and Anna were waiting for. When they saw Jesus they knew that he would be the one who would pay the price for their redemption from sin and death. Finally, there is one more thing I want to show you about Anna.

Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher.
(Luke 2:36a)

Anna was a prophetess, one who spoke God's Word. But why are we told that she was of the tribe of Asher? Asher was one of the ten tribes of northern Israel that were taken captive by the Assyrian Empire, because of their disobedience to God.¹⁰ Many years later some from those tribes returned to Israel. And in 2 Chronicles 30 there was a call to these tribes to come to Jerusalem, return to faith in God and keep the Passover.

¹⁰ 722 B.C. 2 Kings 17

Many of the tribes mocked this call and refused, but one of the three tribes that re-dedicated themselves to God as Asher. Anna came from a long line of people who could have sung, "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus." Now, coming from a family of believers doesn't mean your children or grandchildren will be believers. But it sure sets a firm foundation for their faith.

What we believe about God and Jesus Christ we must pass on to our family and to others. What we do today has an impact upon tomorrow. Simeon and Anna lived in eager expectation of the birth of the Redeemer. Let us live in eager expectation of his return.