



Reflecting on the Hymns in Advent

Come, Thou Long-expected Jesus #88

1. Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.

2. Israel's strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation,
joy of every longing heart.

3. Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a King,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

4. By thine own eternal spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
by thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

The author of this hymn, Charles Wesley, was perhaps, taking quantity and quality into consideration, the great hymn-writer of all ages. He was the youngest son and 18th child (imagine!) of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, and was born at Epworth Rectory, England, Dec. 18, 1707. He was elected to a Westminster studentship at Christ Church, Oxford, where he took his degree in 1729, and became a college tutor. In the early part of the same year his religious impressions were much deepened, and he became one of the first band of "Oxford Methodists." He would come under the influence of those who would shape his brother, John Wesley (the founder of Methodism) and his work was identified with that of his brother, and he became an unrelenting itinerant and field preacher. Over the years, however, he was troubled about the relations of Methodism to the Church of England, and strongly disapproved of his brother John's "ordinations." He died in London, March 29, 1788, and was buried in Marylebone churchyard even though his brother John was deeply grieved because he would not consent to be interred in the burial-ground of the City Road (Methodist) Chapel. Charles had said, however, "I have lived, and I die, in the Communion of the Church of England, and I will be buried in the yard of my parish church." He is said to have written no less than 6500 hymns. In 1744, Charles Wesley reflected upon the situation of

orphans in the areas around him. He also looked at the class divide in Great Britain. Through this train of thought, he wrote "Come, Thou long expected Jesus" based upon Haggai 2:7 (Hymnary.org)

There are certainly echoes in this hymn to our Gospel reading for today. Mary is visited by the angel Gabriel who brings the incredible news that her unborn child "will be called the son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David." This proclamation and the whole Gospel reading have a direct connection to the Old Testament reading in 2 Samuel 7:1-11,16 and God's covenant with David: "Your house and your kingdom shall be made forever before me; your throne shall be established forever."

Perhaps the most important theme of this Old Testament reading is God's continual insistence to dwell among God's people, not in the human "boxes" or structures that people continue to construct. God prefers to live in a tent that can be "moved about among all the people" (vv.5-6) This is a concept that we will remember when, at some point at Christmas, we hear the words of John's Gospel "And the Word became flesh and lived among us..." (1:14) Now in our Gospel reading for today: Luke 1:26-38, God's makes this claim upon Mary's life and enters human life with all its joys and all its brokenness. This

annunciation is an announcement of hope and justice and peace for all humankind.

It is this glorious announcement that Charles Wesley's hymn was written to proclaim: "Born thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King, born to reign in us forever, now thy gracious kingdom bring."

Questions to Ponder

1. Where and how do you experience God's great desire to "move about among all the people." When and where do you feel closest to the presence of God in your life?
2. Read Haggai 2:1-9. How would this passage have inspired Charles Wesley to write this hymn? How does this passage link to our scripture readings for today: 2 Samuel 7:1-11.16 and Luke 1:26-38.
3. God's desire to dwell among us is only half the equation. As Wesley says, the coming of Christ at Christmas also requires a "longing heart" and a willing and obedient heart, as well. What is Mary's beautiful response to the angel Gabriel's earth-shattering news? (v.38) When have you ever felt a calling to be the "servant of the Lord?" Do you feel a calling now? Is there something or some situation in your life now, that God's desire to dwell among us, might bring the same hope and joy and peace?