



# Scripture and History

”O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is possibly the oldest Christmas carol still sung today. It dates back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century and presents the biblical roles and prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. It crossed over from being a song only sung by professional singers in Latin to one that has been translated and sung popularly around the world.



God has come again and pitched his tent with us.  
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**Verse 1** is from **Isaiah 7:14** and **Matthew 1:23** and introduces Emmanuel – God with us – and Israel as a symbol for the Christian world, held captive on a dark and sinful Earth.

O come, O come Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here,  
Until the Son of God appears.

Each verse is completed by the **Refrain**:

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel,  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!

**Verse 2** from **Isaiah 11** presents Christ as the rod or branch of Jesse; the only one who can defeat Satanic designs and bring eternal life to all those who follow Him.

O come thou rod of Jesse, free;  
Thine own from Satan’s tyranny.  
From depths of hell thy people save.  
And give them vict’ry o’er the grave.

**Verse 3** presents the image of the Morning Star that is traced back to **Malachi 4:2** “The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.”

O come O Dayspring, come and cheer;  
Our spirits by Thine advent here.  
And drive away the shades of night.  
And death’s dark shadows put to flight.

In the Middle Ages, the ancient words were sung one verse per day during the last Advent week before Christmas, and richly illustrate the prophecies fulfilled by Jesus’ incarnation on earth. For people of the Dark ages – the minority of whom could read or had access to the Bible – the hymn was one of their few views into the full story of how New and Old Testament views of the Messiah come together in the birth and life of Jesus.

Today there may be as many versions of this ancient hymn as there are stars in the sky. John Mason Neale, a passionate pastor, reformer, minister and missionary to the least of these, found the carol in the book “Psalterium Canticum Catholicarum.” He was inspired by the text and translated the carol into English. The full version is rarely sung due to its length.

**Verse 4** is from **Isaiah 22:22** and explains that the newborn King is the key to heaven, giving us the power to become children of God.

O come, Thou Key of David, come,  
And open wide our heavenly home.  
Make safe the way that leads on high,  
And close the path to misery.

**Verse 5** focuses on the only source of true wisdom and presents God in His glorious majesty. His law convicted man of his sin and set the stage for the Savior; the only one who could fulfill the law and thus be the only perfect sacrifice cleansing human kind and the world of all sin. In some texts the first line reads, “O come, thou wisdom from on high.”

O come, O come, Adonai,  
Who in thy glorious majesty,  
From Sinai’s mountain, clothed in awe,  
Gavest Thy folk the elder law.

**Verse 6** from **Haggai 2:6, 7, 9** For thus saith the LORD of hosts: `Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory,' saith the LORD of hosts. The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former,' saith the LORD of hosts. `And in this place will I give peace,' saith the LORD of hosts.

O come Desire of nations bind,  
In one the hearts of all mankind.  
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,  
And be Thyself our King of Peace.

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