



O Come, O Come

The First Sunday of Advent

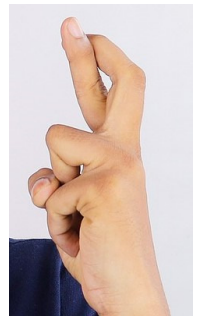
... and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.
Romans 5:5 (NASB)

The celebration of Advent goes waaaay back (to the 5th century A.D. at least), and the Advent wreath, with the lighting of a different candle each Sunday of Advent, first came into being in the 16th century. Different traditions use different colored candles and different meanings and order for what each candle symbolizes, but what seems most common is that the candles represent hope, love, joy, peace, and Christ. And so, on this first Sunday of Advent we celebrate hope.

That seems an appropriate start because, above all, Advent is about hope, about expectation. It is a season of looking forward to the coming King.

We often use the word hope in conjunction with something we don't know or can't be sure of. "I hope it will be sunny tomorrow." "I hope I get that job." It's true we can't control the outcome of the thing we hope for, but that doesn't equate hope with wishful thinking.

I love that in Italian the word for "to hope" (*sperare*) implies not just to wish but to expect, to plan. It is defined as "Trust in the possibility that something deemed positive will happen." And thus, hope walks hand-in-hand with faith.



For centuries the Jews waited in expectation for God to send the Messiah. It was not wishful thinking; it was hope based on the character and identity of the One who had made the promise. It took a long, long time, but their hopes were fulfilled. Our Advent hope is both a remembrance of God fulfilling that promise and an expectation to the Messiah's return, a two-way hope.

Children hope to receive the toys they want for Christmas. Sometimes we hope for equally ephemeral gifts. And while there's nothing wrong with that, it's important to balance our transient wishes with hope grounded in the Giver of all good gifts.

We can't control the outcome of our hopes. We might not get that sunny day or that new job. But we can control what we hope in, Whom we hope in. Hope in God is never wishful thinking because God is faithful. Hope in His promises will never disappoint.



What are you hoping for in this month of Christmas preparation?

What can you do to keep returning your hope to the One who fulfills His promises?

Exercise:

1. Commit this time to God, asking Him to speak to you throughout this exercise.
2. Listen to Charles Wesley's wonderful Christmas song "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" (<https://youtu.be/0dmO8UPIWoo>)
3. Now consider the lyrics (to the right). What words or phrases catch your attention? Ask the Lord to reveal to you why those words or phrases speak to you.
4. Listen to the song again or just re-read the lyrics. Notice how you react to the descriptions of Jesus and the requests being made in this song. Ask God to show you why you've reacted this way.
5. Finally ask God what He wants to say to you through the song, the truth behind the song, and/or your reactions to this exercise.

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

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.
Israel's strength and consolation,
Hope of all the earth Thou art;
Dear desire 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 Thine own eternal Spirit
Rule in all our hearts alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.
By Thine all sufficient merit,
Raise us to Thy glorious throne

Words by Charles Wesley
Music by Rowland H. Prichard