

# ADULT STUDY PACK

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## LEADER'S GUIDE: SESSION 1

# O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

## Reflections on Four Seasonal Hymns for Adults

### Goal for the Session

Adults will explore how the hymn “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” weaves themes of Advents past, present, and future into a prayer beseeching Jesus to come. They will also find ways to savor this time of waiting and preparation.

### Preparing for the Session

- The Resource Sheet “Hymn Appearances of Advent Study Hymns” in this Leader’s Guide is a list of hymnals (with page numbers) that include the hymns explored in all four sessions. Use it as a reference for the entire study.
- Read through the Participant Handout. Listen to a recording of the hymn, or play it for yourself using all three tunes associated with the lyrics.
- Check to see if all three hymn tunes suggested in the Participant Handout are in your hymnal. If one or more is omitted, do a search online for the tune.
- Secure a meeting space with a piano if possible, and recruit an accompanist. Provide copies of all three suggested hymn tunes for that person. If a piano and accompanist are not available, recordings of hymn tunes can be found online.
- On newsprint or a board, print the following: “I can’t wait until . . .”

### Session at a Glance

#### OPENING

- Hear Scripture
- Respond to a prompt
- Pray together

#### EXPLORING

- Meet Charles Wesley
- Explore the theme of Advent past
- Experience the theme of Advent present

#### RESPONDING

- Sing the hymn

#### CLOSING

- Affirm three aspects of Advent
- Pray together

- On index cards, print the following phrases but not the answers: Bard of Methodism; some well-known hymns by Wesley; Oxford Holy Club; reason for the name Methodism; sing lustily; sing all, sing in time, sing spiritually; dual purpose of hymn collections.

- On three separate sheets of newsprint, print the following:
  - Recalling biblical Israel's hopeful expectation of deliverance and redemption: In what circumstances today do we hope for deliverance and redemption?
  - Recognizing God's advent in our lives each day: Where do we see God's advent?
  - Waiting in hopeful expectation of Christ's return: How do our hopes for Christ's return shape our lives?
- Post at intervals around your space or on tables.

## Materials Needed

- Newsprint sheets and markers
- Index cards
- Pens or pencils
- Bibles
- Copies of the Participant Handout
- Hymnals with "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"
- Copies of Participant Handout for session 2

## Teaching Tip

Opening this session and those to follow with a time for quietly listening to the hymn being played not only introduces participants to the music, it also communicates that Advent is a time for reflection, in contrast to the frenzy of the Christmas shopping season.

## Opening (5 minutes)

As participants arrive, have your accompanist play the hymn through softly using all three tunes in turn. Encourage adults to take a seat quietly and listen to the music.

### 1. Hear Scripture

Invite two volunteers to read aloud the following: Isaiah 61:1–2 and Luke 1:47–55.

### 2. Respond to a Prompt

Welcome participants to the study and introduce any who are new to the group. Call the group's attention to the posted prompt. Invite them to complete the phrase with whatever comes to mind, and jot their responses down. Then ask them to read the first few paragraphs of the Participant Handout. Ask volunteers to summarize the information about the season of Advent. Ask:

- How is the preparation of Advent different from the preparations for the impending Christmas holiday?

- What is different about waiting in anticipation for Christ's coming?
- Tell adults that the hymn they will be encountering in this session explores three aspects of Advent waiting: past, present, and future. Invite a volunteer to read aloud from the Participant Handout the three ways we can focus on the past, present, and future nature of Advent.

## 3. Pray Together

Pray the following or a prayer of your choosing:

Come, Lord Jesus. In the midst of our busyness, open to us the gift of melody and lyric, there to discern your voice and call. Amen.

## Exploring (20 minutes)

### 4. Meet Charles Wesley

Form six pairs or small groups. Distribute one of the prepared cards to each pair or group (or to individuals if the group is small). As a way of quickly learning about Charles Wesley, the writer of this session's hymn, ask them to scan the information in the Participant Handout about Wesley to locate segments that explain the words on their card. After allowing a few minutes, ask each pair or group to report to the larger group what their words or phrase have to do with Wesley's life.

### 5. Explore the Theme of Advent Past

Ask the group to turn to the hymn and to read the lyrics silently. Point out that the Participant Handout observes that Wesley skillfully weaves together the themes of Advent past, present, and future. The Scriptures the group heard read in the opening flesh out the Old Testament promises of a Messiah as well as the promise fulfilled in the birth of Christ.

Ask them to look at the first stanza, a prayer beseeching Jesus to come. Discuss:

- How do the lyrics present a Messiah who is simultaneously past and present, cosmic and personal?
- The writer lays out side by side the original first stanza of the hymn with the revised lines. In what way do the altered lines modify Wesley's meaning? Which lyric most resonates with you? Which has the most meaning for you, to be "released" or to be "relieved"?

- How does Wesley define “rest” in the original lyric? What is the meaning of the “noble pun” Wesley was making?

## 6. Experience the Theme of Advent Present

Refer the group to the lyrics of the second stanza, as well as the information in the Participant Handout under the heading “Advent Present.” Invite the group to consider the line from the first stanza, “born to set thy people free,” along with the line “born thy people to deliver.” Note that the writer of the Participant Handout observes that the use of the word “deliver” suggests that Jesus was born to act as a midwife in the new birth of his people. On a sheet of newsprint or a board, print the following: liberator (“set free”) deliverer (midwife); child; king. Form four smaller groups or pairs. Assign one of the four metaphors for Jesus to each group. Ask them to discuss the following:

- What words, phrases, or characteristics does this image or role imply for the Messiah?
- Have each group or pair report to the larger group. Then discuss:
- In the light of other images or characterizations of the Christ, what paradoxes emerge?
- The writer suggests that Advent allows time for us to revel in the mystery of the incarnation and ponder what it means for us today. What implications do you see personally for each image or characterization?

## Responding

### 7. Sing the Hymn (10 minutes)

Following the suggestion in the Participant Handout, sing the hymn to each of the three suggested tunes. Ask volunteers to introduce each tune with some of the information in the text about its origin. Before singing, review the opinions of John Wesley, Charles Wesley’s famous brother, about how congregations should sing. Also ask the accompanist to play through each tune once before the group sings it.

After singing the lyrics to all three tunes, discuss the following questions suggested in the Participant Handout:

- In your opinion, which of the three tunes best expresses the emotional depth of the text? Why?
- Which, if any, of these tunes lends itself to singing “lustily,” as in John Wesley’s instructions? Which,

if any, lends itself to singing “spiritually?” Do you think one of these attitudes is more appropriate than the other for this hymn?

- Does singing the hymn to one of the alternate tunes highlight different aspects of the text? If so, which tune and what aspects?
- Which tune do you, personally, prefer? Why?

## Closing (10 minutes)

### 8. Affirm Three Aspects of Advent

Call attention to the posted sheets with the three aspects of Advent, along with questions. Ask participants to move around the room in silence, reading the questions and jotting down responses. After allowing a few minutes, gather the group together to debrief. Invite volunteers to tell how they responded to the questions. Then discuss:

- The writer observes that we are people living between the past and the not yet, blending memory with hope. She suggests the need to be mindful of God’s faithfulness in the past, attentive to God’s action in our lives today, and joyfully anticipatory of our future in God. What practices can you suggest that might help us savor the waiting in Advent?
- How might we make use of this Advent hymn in the coming week to center our times of devotion?

List practices the group suggests, and encourage participants to choose one practice to use in the coming week. Distribute copies of the session 2 Participant Handout (or plan to e-mail it) and encourage participants to read prior to the next session.

### 9. Pray Together

As the writer suggests, close by praying the lines from Charles Wesley’s hymn “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.” If you prefer, have the group sing the lines as a prayer.

## Teaching Alternatives

### Explore Finding Rest

Ask a volunteer to read aloud the lines from George Herbert’s poem “The Pulley”<sup>1</sup> and invite the group to respond to the idea that God withheld rest from the other blessings bestowed on humanity. Ask the group to describe how they would define “rest in Jesus.” Then have someone read the last paragraph in the Participant Handout under the heading “Hymn with a Past!” (beginning with “Throughout the biblical narrative . . .”)

in which the writer points out how Wesley defines rest in Jesus. Discuss ways that participants in the next week might focus their times of prayer each day on one of the blessings Wesley lists as part of rest in Jesus. They might reflect on the first day, for example, on how they might gain strength from resting in Jesus.

### Experience Hymn Revisions

To further explore how revisions can alter the meaning of lyrics, invite the group to experience another of Charles Wesley's hymn, the Christmas carol, "Hark! The Herald Angles Sing!" First have participants sing the first stanza of the carol. Then ask them to read the information about the hymn found under the heading "Hymns with a Past." Invite adults with smartphones to find more information about the meaning of the word "welkin" at the website World Wide Words (<http://www.worldwidewords.org/weirdwords/ww-wel1.htm>). Then sing the first stanza of the hymn again, using the original line. Discuss the imagery evoked by Charles Wesley's words and how George Whitfield's alteration changes the image. If time allows, form two groups and assign the first line of the present hymn to one and the original line to another. Ask them to create a visual representation of the line using words, phrases, and line drawings. Then discuss each creation.

### A Deeper Exploration of Tunes

Form three smaller groups or pairs, and assign one of the hymn tunes to each group. Provide a way for each to hear their assigned tune—either by having the accompanist play the melody line for each group or by having them use smartphones to access the tunes online. After reading the information about their tune under the heading "Singing in Advent Present," have each group come up with settings and ways to use that tune that best fit the tune. For example, the writer suggests that STUTTGART is ideal for use as a processional hymn. What instrument might be best to accompany it? Have groups present their suggestions to the total group for discussion. If possible, try a few, such as the processional, while singing the tune.

### Learn a New Tune

If one of the hymn tunes is new to the group, for example, JEFFERSON, invite your choir director or a member of the choir to come and teach the tune to the group. Ask that person to review with the group John Wesley's observation on how congregations should sing

and his directions for instruction from the Participant Handout. Ask your guest to also give the group some additional information about Wesley's directions from <http://exploringchurchhistory.com/john-wesley-hymns-directions-singing/>. Once the group is familiar with the tune and can sing it with confidence, encourage them to add harmonies. If appropriate, add other instruments such as a flute or recorder.

### Compare Images of "King"

Do a deeper exploration of the paradox involved in the line "Born a child and yet a king." As a volunteer reads aloud the second stanza of the hymn, asking participants to listen for the images that refer to a king. Point out that much of what we see depicted about the nativity comes from sentimentalized imagery from Victorian times. Invite the group to quickly describe the nativity based on the words of carols and the art from Christmas cards. Then ask them to think what the reality of that nativity must have been: a poor pregnant teenager, after an exhausting journey, delivering a child in the place where animals were housed. Discuss how Scripture tells us this birth was announced and how the future king was received. Then compare this account with what was portrayed about the birth of the future king of England, Prince George, or the recent birth of Princess Charlotte. How do the media messages about those births compare with the birth of the Messiah?

### Key Scriptures

Isaiah 61:1–2

Luke 1:47–55

### For More Information

#### Further Explore Congregational Singing

Adam Hamilton, *Revival: Faith as Wesley Lived It* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2014). In this study of John Wesley's life, one chapter includes an exploration of the importance of congregational singing for Charles and John Wesley.

### Endnote

1. George Herbert, "The Pulley," <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173635>.

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# Resource Sheet

## Hymn Appearances of Advent Study Hymns

|                                  |                                                                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus   | <i>Celebrating Grace</i> #83                                                  |
|                                  | <i>Chalice Hymnal</i> #125                                                    |
|                                  | <i>Common Praise</i> (1988) #88                                               |
|                                  | <i>The Covenant Hymnal</i> #135                                               |
|                                  | <i>Evangelical Lutheran Worship</i> #254                                      |
|                                  | <i>Gather</i> (3rd ed.) #403                                                  |
|                                  | <i>Gather Comprehensive</i> #323                                              |
|                                  | <i>Glory to God</i> #82, 83                                                   |
|                                  | <i>Hymnal 1982</i> #66                                                        |
|                                  | <i>Lead Me, Guide Me</i> (2nd ed.) #238                                       |
|                                  | <i>Lift Up Your Hearts</i> #56                                                |
|                                  | <i>Lutheran Service Book</i> #338 (JEFFERSON)                                 |
|                                  | <i>Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs</i> #1 (STUTTGART) |
|                                  | <i>Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs</i> #2 (HYFRYDOL)  |
|                                  | <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i> #196                                       |
|                                  | <i>Voices United</i> #2                                                       |
|                                  | <i>Worship and Rejoice</i> #153                                               |
|                                  | <i>The Worshipping Church</i> #135                                            |
| Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silent | <i>Celebrating Grace</i> #81                                                  |
|                                  | <i>Chalice Hymnal</i> #124                                                    |
|                                  | <i>Common Praise</i> (1998) #48                                               |
|                                  | <i>The Covenant Hymnal</i> #127                                               |
|                                  | <i>Evangelical Lutheran Worship</i> #490                                      |
|                                  | <i>Gather</i> (3rd ed.) #619                                                  |
|                                  | <i>Gather Comprehensive</i> #540                                              |
|                                  | <i>Glory to God</i> #347                                                      |
|                                  | <i>Hymnal 1982</i> #324                                                       |
|                                  | <i>Lift Up Your Hearts</i> #821                                               |
|                                  | <i>Lutheran Service Book</i> #621                                             |
|                                  | <i>Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs</i> #5             |
|                                  | <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i> #626                                       |
|                                  | <i>Voices United</i> #473                                                     |
|                                  | <i>Worship and Rejoice</i> #232                                               |
|                                  | <i>The Worshipping Church</i> #167                                            |

|                          |                                                                    |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| O Come, O Come, Emmanuel | <i>Celebrating Grace</i> #79                                       |
|                          | <i>Chalice Hymnal</i> #119                                         |
|                          | <i>Common Praise</i> (1988) #89                                    |
|                          | <i>The Covenant Hymnal</i> #120                                    |
|                          | <i>Evangelical Lutheran Worship</i> #257                           |
|                          | <i>Gather</i> (3rd ed.) #395                                       |
|                          | <i>Gather Comprehensive</i> #317                                   |
|                          | <i>Glory to God</i> #88                                            |
|                          | <i>Hymnal</i> 1982 #56                                             |
|                          | <i>Lead Me, Guide Me</i> (2nd ed.) #231                            |
|                          | <i>Lift Up Your Hearts</i> #61                                     |
|                          | <i>Lutheran Service Book</i> #357                                  |
|                          | <i>Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs</i> #9  |
|                          | <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i> #s 112b, 211                    |
|                          | <i>Voices United</i> #1                                            |
|                          | <i>Worship and Rejoice</i> #154                                    |
|                          | <i>The Worshipping Church</i> #133                                 |
| In the Bleak Midwinter   | <i>Celebrating Grace</i> #131                                      |
|                          | <i>Common Praise</i> (1998) #122                                   |
|                          | <i>The Covenant Hymnal</i> #151                                    |
|                          | <i>Evangelical Lutheran Worship</i> #294                           |
|                          | <i>Glory to God</i> #144                                           |
|                          | <i>Hymnal</i> 1982 #112                                            |
|                          | <i>Presbyterian Hymnal: Hymns, Psalms, and Spiritual Songs</i> #36 |
|                          | <i>The United Methodist Hymnal</i> #221                            |
|                          | <i>Voices United</i> #55                                           |
|                          | <i>Worship and Rejoice</i> #196                                    |

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## PARTICIPANT'S HANDOUT: SESSION 1

# O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

## Reflections on Four Seasonal Hymns for Adults

### Introduction

"I can't wait until Christmas" expresses eager anticipation for the holiday by children young and old! Halloween is scarcely past when Christmas decorations appear in stores and shoppers hear carols broadcast throughout shopping malls. Congregations, eager to sing Christmas carols, often express impatience with singing only Advent hymns. With the frenzied festivities surrounding the season, it is hard to wait for Christmas. However, wait we must, for Advent is a season of waiting and preparing for Christ's coming.

Advent, from the Latin *adventus*, means "coming." First observed around the fourth century in Gaul, Advent was a solemn season of penitential preparation for the baptismal Feast of the Epiphany. It was not until the practice spread to Rome that it became associated with Christmas. Sermons exist from the fifth century exhorting the faithful to prepare for Christ's coming with spiritual disciplines such as prayer, penance, and fasting.

Today, churches observe Advent for the four Sundays preceding Christmas and practice traditions such as lighting candles on Advent wreaths, decorating Jesse trees, or engaging in spiritual disciplines of prayer and Bible study. As we wait in anticipation of Christ's coming, we can focus on the past, present, and future nature of Advent by:

1. Recalling biblical Israel's hopeful expectation of deliverance and redemption.

2. Recognizing God's advent in our lives each day.
3. Waiting in hopeful expectation of Christ's return.

These three facets of Advent converge in the hymn by Charles Wesley, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus."

### Charles Wesley: Bard of Methodism

Charles Wesley (1707–88) has been popularly dubbed the "bard of Methodism," a title attributed, in part, to having written nine thousand sacred poems and hymns. Today congregations around the world sing his hymns of praise and devotion such as "O, For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," "Jesus, Lover of My Soul," and "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling." It is inconceivable to imagine Christmas without Wesley's "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" or Easter without his "Christ, the Lord is Risen Today"!

Charles Wesley was the eighteenth child of Samuel and Susannah Wesley. He and his older brother John (1703–91) attended Oxford University. While students, Charles, John, and George Whitefield (1714–70) founded the Oxford Holy Club, "promoting a disciplined approach to Bible study, worship, visitation to the sick and imprisoned, and the frequent observance of Holy Communion."<sup>1</sup> Their members acquired the name "Methodist" because of their methodical approach to spiritual discipline. Although they were both ordained Anglican clergy, Charles and John became evangelists who traveled throughout Great Britain preaching salvation and founding and encouraging Methodist societies.

Charles was a gifted hymnwriter whose texts were based on strong theology and grounded in Scripture.

Congregational singing was an integral part of the Methodist movement, with people singing their faith publicly in society meetings and evangelistic services and privately in devotions. John and Charles Wesley sought to improve congregational singing through expanding the repertoire and providing musical instruction to society members. While Charles directed his energy toward writing hymns, John edited and published those hymns. In some of his hymnbooks, John included sections on how to read music. John frequently voiced strong opinions on how congregations should sing. The Methodist Conference Minutes of 1765 are but one example:

Teach them to sing by note, and to sing our tunes first: take care they do not sing too slow. Exhort all that can in every congregation to sing. Set them right that sing wrong. Be patient herein.<sup>2</sup>

In the preface to *Select Hymns: with Tunes Annexed* (1761), he set out some “directions for singing.” Included among these were directives to “sing lustily,” “sing all,” “sing in time,” and “sing spiritually.”<sup>3</sup>

“Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” first appeared as “Dear Desire of Every Nation” in a collection of eighteen new hymns published in 1745, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*. The Wesleys frequently published small, affordable collections, or pamphlets, of hymn texts intended for widespread distribution. These collections had a dual purpose: to disseminate Methodist theology and to enrich the spiritual life of members of the Methodist society.<sup>4</sup> Similar collections focused on seasonal themes such as *Hymns for Our Lord’s Resurrection* (1746) and *Hymns for Ascension-Day* (1746).<sup>5</sup> Apparently, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord* was especially popular with early British Methodists, because it was published in more than twenty editions during Wesley’s lifetime.

## A Hymn for Three Advents: Past, Present, and Future

Wesley skillfully weaves themes of Advents past, present, and future into a collective prayer beseeching Jesus to come. The text alludes to Old Testament promises of a Messiah, the New Testament birth of the Child/King

Jesus, and a plea for God’s reign now and in future glory.

Wesley’s original hymn text appeared as two eightline-stanzas with punctuation allowing each stanza to divide neatly into two four-line units.

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.

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**The text alludes to Old Testament promises of a Messiah, the New Testament birth of the Child/King Jesus, and a plea for God’s reign now and in future glory.**

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## Advent Past

Stanza 1 sets the tone for the entire hymn as a fervent prayer for Jesus to come, the Messiah promised to liberate “thy” people, presumably Israel. The Hebrews had experienced God’s deliverance many times in their history and hoped for a messiah who would bring them freedom. The prophet Isaiah sums up ancient Israel’s messianic expectations:

... to bring good news to the oppressed,  
to bind up the brokenhearted,  
to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
and release to the prisoners;  
to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor,  
and the day of vengeance of our God;  
to comfort all who mourn (Isaiah 61:1–2)

Later, Mary sings of God's past actions on the behalf of her people:

His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of  
their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their  
thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.<sup>6</sup>

The first half of this stanza alludes to these promises and is followed by a petition for relief from "fears and sins," allowing "rest in thee."

In the second half of the stanza, Wesley fleshes out the anticipated Messiah as strength and consolation for Israel, hope of the world, desire of all nations, and joy for longing hearts. Remarkably, these same four lines move us from expecting a messiah intended only for the Jews to the broader inclusion of Gentiles. We move from a global perspective (hope of all the earth) narrowed to every nation desiring him and then to a focused intimacy of every longing heart. The advent of this long-expected Jesus is a messiah who is simultaneously past and present, cosmic and personal.

## Hymn with a Past!

Seldom does a hymn survive several centuries without some revision. Occasionally, authors self-edit their work, but more frequently textual alterations are made by hymnal committees or publishers. Often archaic words or terms are replaced with words more appealing to modern sensibilities. Consider Wesley's opening lines of "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing:"

Hark how all the welkin rings  
"Glory to the King of kings"

To sing these lines with understanding, one would need to know that "welkin" is an archaic literary term for the celestial spheres or the vaults of heaven encased within a crystal dome. Wesley invites the singer to listen to the awesome ringing resounding throughout

the heavens at the birth of the King of kings! Within 15 years of this hymn's publication, the English evangelist (and cofounder of the Oxford Holy Club) George Whitefield altered the text to the more familiar:

Hark! The herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the newborn King!"<sup>7</sup>

Although Whitefield's alteration may be one reason we continue singing this text with gusto every year, Wesley's extraordinary sonic image is lost.

Similarly, there are alterations in the first stanza of "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus" that deserve attention. Compare the original first four lines on the left with the revised lines on the right.

|                                    |                                    |
|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Come, thou long-expected<br>JESUS, | Come, thou long-expected<br>Jesus, |
| Born to set thy people free,       | born to set thy people free;       |
| From our Fears and Sins            | from our fears and sins            |
| relieve us,                        | release us;                        |
| Let us find our Rest in thee:      | let us find our rest in thee.      |

Notice the change of metaphor from "relieve" to "release" and the replacement of the colon with a period. Exchanging "relieve" with "release" appears to pair nicely with the reference in the previous line to Jesus as the messiah born to bring freedom. However, this alteration modifies Wesley's meaning. In the original text, the sung prayer is for finding *relief* from fears and sin, relief from all our pain, angst, turmoil, stress, and worry produced by a flawed humanity.<sup>8</sup> Wesley's words assure us that by turning to Jesus, we will find the welcome respite we seek from this chaotic world.

The idea of "finding rest" in Jesus was familiar to literary audiences in the eighteenth century. According to one scholar, Wesley was making a "noble pun" on a line from "The Pulley" by seventeenth-century devotional poet George Herbert.<sup>9</sup> This poem relates how God, at creation, had a glass filled to the brim with blessings to bestow on humanity: strength, beauty, wisdom, honor, pleasure, and rest. God lavishly poured out these blessings—*all but rest*.

"For if I should," said he,  
"Bestow this jewell also on my creature,  
He would adore my gifts instead of me,  
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature;  
So both should losers be.  
"Yet let him keep the rest,  
But keep them with repining restlessness;  
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,

If goodness lead him not, yet weariness  
May tosse him to my breast."<sup>10</sup>

Throughout the biblical narrative, the Creator yearns for humanity to find rest, respite, and repose in God, to glorify God, and to enjoy God forever. How does Wesley define this “rest”? In his original text, the fourth line ends with a colon, implying that what follows is listing

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## The God of Advent present comes to us daily, meeting us in our challenges, weeping with us in our sorrows, prodding us to advance God’s kingdom, and rejoicing with us in hope.

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of what “rest in thee” is: strength, consolation, hope, desire, and joy. These are all blessings poured out for us as we live in Advent present.

### Advent Present

The second stanza realizes the Hebraic promise with the birth of Jesus. While echoing the second line from the first stanza, the text appears to be a continuation of that stanza with more entreaties for Jesus to come. However, Wesley’s text transcends mere recitation to acknowledge Advent present through the emphatic, repeated use of the word “born”:

*Born* thy people to deliver,  
*born* a child and yet a king,  
*born* to reign in us forever.

In these lines, Wesley explores the mystery of our Messiah’s birth. Although “born to deliver” sounds like a paraphrase of “born to set thy people free,” the use of “deliver” suggests that Jesus was born to act as midwife in the new birth of his people.<sup>11</sup> The paradox of “born a child and yet a king” stretches the limits of human understanding, leaving us stunned in wonder and awe at the Incarnation.<sup>12</sup> The waiting inherent during the Advent season allows time for us to revel in this mystery and ponder what it means for us today.

Notice that Wesley did not write Jesus *was born*: no passive tense here! Nor is the story confined to the pages of Scripture. The God of Advent present comes to us daily, meeting us in our challenges, weeping with us in our sorrows, prodding us to advance God’s kingdom, and rejoicing with us in hope.

## Singing in Advent Present

This text appears in numerous hymnals set to various tunes. Three of the tunes that are commonly used each capture a different mood of the text. The Welsh tune HYFRYDOL is the melody most frequently associated with this text. Composed by Rowland Huw Prichard (1811–87), an official in the Welsh Flannel Manufactur-

ing Company, HYFRYDOL first appeared in his 1844 tunebook *Cyfaill y Cantorion* [*The Singer’s Friend*], a collection of tunes intended for use in Sunday school. The purpose of Prichard’s collection

was to provide fitting tunes “to wean them from ‘empty and defiling songs’ to those that are devotional and moral.”<sup>13</sup> This graceful, dignified tune accommodates the text in two stanzas.

A second tune featured with this text is STUTTGART, composed by Christian Witt (1660–1716). Witt was a German organist, composer of sacred music, and hymnal editor. This melody appeared in Witt’s 1715 compilation, *Psalmodia sacra*. Although this tune requires dividing the text into four stanzas, it is a sturdy, bold tune ideal for singing the text as a processional hymn.<sup>14</sup>

JEFFERSON, the third tune, is from the southern singing school tradition and was included in William Walker’s 1835 *Southern Harmony*. It is a folk-style tune set in a minor key, and its length accommodates the text in its original two stanzas. The text takes on a yearning and plaintive urgency when sung to this tune.

Try singing the text to all three tunes. Consider which tune best sings the text. Which of the three tunes best express the emotional depth of the text? Do any of these tunes lend themselves more to singing “lustily” or “spiritually,” as in John Wesley’s instructions? Does singing the hymn to one of the alternate tunes highlight different aspects of the text?

## Advent Future

We are people living between the past and the not yet, blending memory with hope. In this time of “not yet,” we wait, perhaps impatiently, for the time in which God’s creation is perfected and God’s gracious reign is eternal. For now, as we daily experience the

midwife-Jesus “born to deliver,” we can confidently pray these lines from another Wesley hymn:

Finish then thy new creation; pure and spotless  
let us be;  
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in  
thee:  
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we  
take our place,  
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder,  
love, and praise.<sup>15</sup>

As we begin this Advent season, let us savor the waiting and be mindful of God’s faithfulness to us in the past, attentive to God’s action in our lives today, and joyfully anticipate our future in God when we are “raised to thy glorious throne” and are completely, ultimately lost in wonder, love, and praise!

## Endnotes

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2. Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music: From Gregorian Chant to Black Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 117.
3. David W. Music, *Hymnology: A Collection of Source Readings* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1996), 139–40.
4. C. Michael Hawn, “History of Hymns: Hymn Expresses Longing for Arrival of Our Savior,” *Discipleship Ministries: The United Methodist Church*, <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-hymn-expresses-longing-for-arrival-of-our-savior>.
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6. Luke 1: 50–55 (NSRV). Mary’s song of praise is commonly referred to as the Magnificat.
7. Opening lines changed by George Whitefield in *Hymns for Social Worship* (1753), [http://www.hymnary.org/text/hark\\_the\\_herald\\_angels\\_sing\\_glory\\_to](http://www.hymnary.org/text/hark_the_herald_angels_sing_glory_to).
8. Madeleine Forell Marshall, *Common Hymnsense* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 1995), 66–67.
9. Ibid.
10. George Herbert, “The Pulley,” <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/173635>.
11. Marshall, 68.
12. Jason E. Vickers, “‘And We the Life of God Shall Know’: Incarnation and the Trinity in Charles Wesley’s Hymns,” *Anglican Theological Review*, 90:2, 336.
13. Alan Luff, *Welsh Hymns and Their Tunes* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing Co., 1990), 176.
14. Paul Westermeyer, *Let the People Sing* (Chicago: GIA, 2005), 148–49.
15. Charles Wesley, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), #366.

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