

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Daily Readings

The song "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus" was written in 1744 and the author Charles Wesley was surrounded by scenes of homelessness, orphans, and squalid poverty. Eighteenth-century England was wracked with weak religion, rampant sin, and very frequently a callous indifference to the suffering of the lower classes. Looking at Haggai 2:7 for inspiration, Wesley penned a work that expressed a dear hope for Christ to come again and set all things right. Despite the circumstances that inspired the song, the hope and the joy in the words of this song leap off the page! Look for pieces of them each day as you do the readings from December 1st—December 25th. Light a candle as you read the passages of Scripture and small devotions each day, to remind you that Christ is the light of the world

Week One: Hope

December 1: Read Luke 1:5-17

An angel came to Zechariah to tell him his wife would have a child, a child who would prepare the way for Jesus. This child's name ends up being John the Baptist. "Joy", "Gladness", "Rejoice" are all words used to describe how Zechariah and Elizabeth will feel when John is born. The reason for all these feelings of joy is hope—it's what makes us excited and looking forward not just to Christmas day but to what Jesus is doing in us and the world and what he will do in the future! This hope brings "the joy of every longing heart", and also grounds us in a deep trust of Him. *What do you hope for the most this Advent season?*

December 2: Read Luke 1: 26-33

Another angel, this one named Gabriel, came to visit Mary and tell her she would have a son who would be "the Son of the Most High" and she was troubled by this news. And he tells her to not be afraid, because she had found favor with God.

God's people had waited for this hope. Mary knew that God had promised to send One who would save the world. And God chose her to bring that hope into the world! Her fear was understandable, and she also knew God would be with her. That was her hope to help her not be afraid. "Hope of all the earth thou art." *What things have made you fearful this year? And what are some ways we can trust Jesus in that fear?*

December 3: Read Luke 1: 34-38

The angel smiled gently and spoke into the doubts clouding her head. "Nothing is impossible with God." With those words, Mary's heart felt lighter and her hope grew stronger.

I belong to the Lord. Whatever He wants me to do, I will do, she thought. Then she smiled, too. When Jesus came into Mary's world, He made her ordinary life into something extraordinary. Everything she had planned was suddenly changed. Everything normal was gone, but what may have looked like a disaster to other people was actually God writing an amazing story into Mary's life. *What are some things you saw God in your life this year? How did He write your story?*

December 4: Read Luke 1: 39-50

After Mary received word that she would give birth, she travels to visit family. This is one of the great traditions we have in America at Christmas: visiting family! Mary's cousin Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit when she sees her, proclaiming Mary will have a baby—and that baby is the Messiah, the One hoped for.

What a wonderful confirmation of what the angel Gabriel said to Mary! The long-awaited One, for hundreds and hundreds of years, was now to become real to God's people. This was no mere "tradition" of the Jewish people to think about or tell

stories about—this was a real prophecy about the real Messiah: “Israel’s strength and consolation.” What a reason to rejoice. *What is one family tradition you have that you hope to continue with this year?*

December 5: Read Luke 1: 51-55

In this part of Mary’s famous sermon, The Magnificat, she proclaims God’s strength, but also His judgement on those who are proud and mighty... those who had sinned against God. Mary speaks of how God deals with His people, and this is a reminder of why He was sending the Messiah in first place—we are all sinners in need of someone to rescue us.

“Born to set thy people free” is the second line in our theme hymn, another reminder of what sin does, but what Jesus did is greater. His death and resurrection conquered sin and death, and this great hope of the gospel is the reason we anticipate and celebrate with joy this Advent season. *Spend time confessing your sin before God, and praising Him for setting you free.*

Week Two: *Peace*

December 6: Read Romans 5:5

Listen to the song, “Come Thou Long Expected Jesus” (Meredith Andrews’ version is a favorite) in full after reading this verse. Spend some time pondering these questions:

In what ways does Jesus make me feel expectant and hopeful?

In what ways does He make me feel loved?

What are some ways I can show this hope and love to someone I know?

Today is Sunday, the day of rest. Watch a Christmas movie! Pop some popcorn and enjoy time with loved ones, and praise Jesus for the hope and the love He freely gives. Spend time confessing your sin before God, and praising Him for setting you free.

December 7: Read Luke 2:1-5

Because Mary was pregnant with Jesus at the time of Caesar’s decree, she ended up giving birth in Bethlehem instead of her hometown. Which fulfills one of the prophecies told about the Messiah in the Old Testament in Micah 5:2. This is just one of the many ways God keeps His promises!

Even though Jesus was born in one part of the world, the message of peace He brought spread through all the nations. He became the “Dear desire of every nation” as the power of the gospel continues to spread everywhere! *Think of someone you know who doesn’t know Jesus as the King and Savior, and begin praying for them today.*

December 8: Read Luke 2:6-7

When we sing of the Savior’s birth, we sometimes call it a “silent night” but the reality is more that it wasn’t quiet at all. Babies cry, even Jesus, and having a baby is hard, so Mary was surely in pain!

Though it wasn’t a truly “silent night” it most certainly was a holy night. Holy means “to set apart” - or in other words, to be different from all the rest. It was the night Jesus came to this world, and brought peace to our relationship with God. Where once there was unrest, Jesus brought peace. “Let us find our rest in Thee.” *Bundle up and head outside and look for peace where you can find it—in the birds, the quiet of the air, the snow... and thank God for this kind of peace, too.*

December 9: Read Isaiah 9:6

God sent us a Savior in the form of a baby. The prophet Isaiah assured us, however, that Jesus would be no ordinary baby and that He would grow up to be no ordinary man. As the Prince of Peace, He invites us into His Kingdom of full and perfect happiness, giving us the assurance of safety and security. As we submit to Him, we will live lives of blessed

closeness to Him.

The child born to us became our strong deliver and our source of security and satisfaction forever. The Son given to us gave Himself for us. *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. How is each one of these names a special gift to you personally? Which one do you especially need in your life right now?*

December 10: Read Isaiah 9:7

No matter how good a government may seem for a time, it's clear that mere humans, even with the best intentions, have never been/will never be able to accomplish an ideal civilization. It's impossible! Only God could accomplish this.

But look at the good news of this passage: that's just what God did! Through the birth of this one babe, this child, God established His Kingdom – overflowing with justice, righteousness and peace with no end. We don't have to wait for some distant future in which He will reign. King Jesus reigns now and forever. If you are a subject of King Jesus, living in His kingdom and under His authority, you already know the goodness of His reign. *If you are a subject of King Jesus, in what ways do you experience His reign every day?*

December 11: Read Luke 2:8-9

Most of us have no idea what it's like to be a shepherd. It was likely extremely hard work. The fear of predators on the sheep alone would be enough to exhaust a person.

Unlike earthly shepherds who fear what could be out there, Jesus actually knows. He knows what is in the darkness and stands between us and danger. We know that He, like a shepherd, wants what is good and right for us. He is our Good Shepherd. Just as sheep follow their shepherd, how are you following the Good Shepherd? And where might He be calling you to follow Him into something harder or more unfamiliar? *Listen to "Come Thou Long Expected Jesus" and pray the line "rule in all our hearts alone" to ask God for wisdom in further obedience to Him in your life.*

December 12: Read Luke 2:10

The message that the Savior of the world was coming was good news. And news "for all the people." *Hope of all the earth thou art.* This is a reminder for us that at one time, being in covenant relationship with God was just for Jewish people. But He changed that by sending Jesus so that all people everywhere had the chance to be close to God and know him personally, too.

But not everyone has heard this good news. How often do we consider that this news is for everyone to hear and the great joy that comes with sharing this news? May we be willing to share this news with all people in our lives—he has come. For us! *What are some ways we tend to keep this news of Jesus to ourselves—and why? Who do we tend to keep this news from?*

Week Three: Joy

December 13: Read Psalm 119:111

When we think about God's law, the emotion of joy isn't often the first one that comes to mind. So what is the Psalmist getting at here? Psalm 119 is the longest Psalm written, and it's a meditation on the "Torah" - the law given to the Jewish people in the first five books of the Bible. What we often forget is what the law tells us about who God is—instead, we focus on what the law demands of us. And that becomes burdensome. Instead, the Psalmist says the law is a heritage and a joy, not a burden. On this Sabbath day (which is part of God's moral law for us) consider what good and gracious things we learn about God from knowing His moral law. *Ask yourself: What are the ways I usually find joy? What are some ways God's law could bring me joy?*

December 14: Read Luke 2:11

The angel announces they bring good news... and in this simple verse, here it is: a Savior has come. There are so many "names" in this verse: Savior, Christ, Lord. It's the combination of all three that tell us who Jesus is. He is the One who came to save us (Savior). He is the promised One, the Messiah, who was chosen by God (Christ). Finally, He is the One to whom we belong (Lord).

Combining all three of these facts about one person tells the story of who Jesus is and what he came to do. Truly, good news for all. A message like this doesn't get any better: for a Rescuer had come to save. *In what ways does this good news bring joy between you and God today? In what ways can it bring joy between you and someone you are struggling to love?*

December 15: Read Luke 2:12

The shepherds were trying understand the magnitude of what the angel was telling them—that the Promised One was indeed, finally here, and they are given a specific sign: a baby? For years and years, Jewish people heard so much about this Promised One. But some specifics were left out. I mean, who would assume, knowing this person would be the one to rescue a whole nation, would come as a baby? Much less, would be born in the trough that cows and horses ate out of? This didn't seem fitting for the long-awaited One. But Jesus would rarely do things people the way people expected Him to. *How has God surprised you lately? What joy have you found from this surprise?*

December 16: Read Luke 2:13-14

Now a large group of angels have appeared and they praise God, declaring His glory and peace on earth! Though it says the angels spoke these words, I like to imagine they were singing these glorious words. Either way, it had to be a special sight for the shepherds. Glory indeed.

But the **message** was even more special. This baby, who birth announcement came in the most spectacular of ways, would bring peace "with whom he is pleased." This is about God and His relationships with those who come to believe in Him. He was "born thy people to deliver" - to rescue those He loved from the sin that kept us from Him. *Call or text someone you haven't heard from in a while, just to say, "Hi, I miss you. How are things?" just to being them a bit of joy.*

December 17: Read Luke 2:15

The shepherds had a pretty clear message sent to them—a host of angels appearing in the sky is something you can't really miss! Notice the end of this verse "the Lord has made known to us." Wouldn't it be great if God would make every one of His messages to us as clear as the one He sent that night?

He did leave us with the Holy Spirit once Jesus returned to Heaven after His time on earth, and the Holy Spirit speaks to us in several ways—through the Bible, through His still, small voice, through other people in our lives. He still makes things known to us today. It's important to stop to listen. *Spend time today and sit in silence with God, practice putting away the voices of the world and listen to His voice only.*

December 18: Read Luke 2:16

The shepherds went to find the Savior "with haste." When was the last time you were so excited you ran, full-on, with unabashed joy toward it? Seems like forever? Joy is not just happiness—it's something much deeper that comes from inside of us no matter how hard our current circumstances. The promise of the gospel is not that we would have happiness and joy, but that He has seen our struggles, and has entered into it *with* us.

The wonder of Christmas is that God Almighty came down. When we called out for help, *He came running. Consider how you can find joy in the midst of your struggles today. Pray this Psalm, "Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning." (Ps. 35:5)*

December 19: Read Luke 2:17-18, 20

The shepherds believed what the angels told them about this ordinary-looking baby, and because they believed, the baby became their Savior. Their lives were never the same after seeing and believing Jesus, so much so they began glorifying and praising God for all they had seen.

When we are given the gift of faith in Jesus, we change. It may not have happened fast, but you cannot encounter Jesus Christ and not be altered forever. Take heart and be encouraged of the work he is doing in your life this Christmas season. "By thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne." *Where did you experience God's grace today? Where did you give grace today? Where did you see God at work today?*

Week Four: *Love*

December 20: Read Luke 2:19

The word was out. This must have been overwhelming for Mary. Seeing how God was working by telling other people who Jesus was, thinking through what would come for her precious child. Certainly, she would feel overcome with many emotions. In this miracle, God was reaching out to us with a message of His love for us.

Receiving the gospel is not just understanding an abstract idea, but it is believing by faith that a glorious God of the universe loved us enough to send His son to die in our place. This little one was "Born a child and yet a king" - our King.

Ponder the overwhelming way God loves you right now—in this moment. Cherish it. And don't keep it to yourself! Get the word out.

December 21: Read Luke 2:27-32

Part of God's law at the time was every first born child be brought to the temple to be presented to the Lord. Mary and Joseph were there with Jesus, and just after we hear the story of the shepherds we hear the story of Simeon, who it had been revealed to him by the Spirit that he would see the Christ before he died.

At the temple, he held Jesus in his arms and spoke these powerful words for us. The words uttered from Simeon are full of joy—he had seen the salvation of the world and a light that would be a revelation. *What promises of God's are you holding close to your heart right now? Bring them before Him in prayer today, and remember that He is faithful.*

December 22: Read Luke 2:36-38

Anna was a prophetess who was also at the temple like Simeon when Mary and Joseph brought Jesus there. God gave her a word that this child would be the one who would bring redemption. A faithful woman of prayer, she recognized her Redeemer, the one who would rescue the world, in this little baby. This news was too good to not tell others.

So what did she do? She spread the word! "Now thy gracious kingdom bring" we sing in verse 3 of our theme song. What does this mean? It means that God's kingdom had come to earth and Jesus was about to do something amazing! *What is something amazing you've seen God do lately? And who haven't you told that needs to hear about it?*

December 23: Read Matthew 2: 1-10

Rumors had started the baby born was the King of the Jews, and this troubled King Herod. So he sent his advisors— we often call them the wise men— to see if it was true. They came from the far east, and that journey would have taken several months, so keep in the mind : the star was still hanging around Jesus long after he was born that night!

The Magi were men who thought star predicted the future. That's not very "wise", is it? And they rejoiced greatly

when they saw the star. They were changed by what they saw—and that’s not the end of the story! *What are the things of this world we tend to listen to more than the things of God? How are we seeing Him change us right now?*

December 24 Read Matthew 2: 11

In the tradition of that time, when one went to meet a king, you brought gifts. The Magi brought the best of what they had to Jesus. Did you know the myrrh they brought could cost as much as \$10,000 today?

What does it look like for you to bring your best to one true king Jesus? It’s not about bringing the most expensive thing. What does our best look like? This looks different for each one of us, because God has given all of us different gifts and passions that get us excited and light us on fire to go out into the world and serve him. Bringing our best to Jesus the king is not about a \$10,000 gift—it’s about what honors Him most. *What are you most passionate about? And how can you use that to serve God?*

December 25

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 saints 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.

-Charles Wesley

"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." - Jesus (John 8:12)