

Christmas Eve Lesson #1 Do we worship baby Jesus?

Welcome to our **lessons** and **carols Christmas Eve service**. My name is Jonathan Romig and I am the Pastor of this church. We've just opened our time by singing *O Come, All Ye Faithful*. I think this is a great Christmas carol to open with because it's invitation to us to come and worship Christ Jesus. But who is the Jesus we've come to worship?

I once saw a **scene** in a **movie** that I thought made a really great **sermon illustration**. But I never thought I would bring this scene up at a Christmas Eve service. The scene is from the movie **Talladega Nights**. This is a **NASCAR** driving movie starring Will Ferrell and in it his character, **Ricky Bobby**, prays to "Dear baby Jesus." He actually gets into an argument with his **wife** and **father-in law** because he prays this way. His wife interrupts him when he's praying to baby Jesus.

Carley: You know sweetie, Jesus did grow up. You don't always have to call him baby. It's a bit odd and off puttin' to pray to a baby.

Ricky: Well look, I like the Christmas Jesus best, and I'm sayin grace. When you say grace, you can say it to grown up Jesus, or teenage Jesus, or bearded Jesus, or whatever you want.¹

I think that's a great illustration because although it's funny, it also get's right down to the **heart of Christmas**. When you think of Jesus this Christmas who are you thinking of? Are you thinking of the sweet innocent baby in the manger? He's the **harmless** Jesus. He's the Jesus who can't do much but sleep, cry, and eat. He won't tell you how to live your life. He doesn't expect much of you.

Or are you thinking of the grown up Jesus who died and rose again and is seated on the throne next to God the Father? That Jesus is **Lord of all**, including your life. In the first verse of *O Come, All Ye Faithful* we do sing to Jesus born at Bethlehem, but he is "born the King of Angels." Even in the first verse we recognize this isn't a harmless baby, but one who has **power** and **authority**. And although each verse sings about some aspect of his birth, each ends with the words, "O come, let us adore Him Christ the Lord!" To be Lord is to rule. To be Lord is to be king. To be Lord is to be sovereign.

Jesus was king at his birth and he is king today. But he's no longer a baby. The New Testament book of Hebrews says this about Jesus.

Hebrews 1:3 "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high," (ESV)

Yes, at Christmas we come to remember the birth of Jesus. But when we sing to Jesus we're not singing to a baby. We're singing to the living reigning Lord. "O come, let us adore him. Christ the Lord!" Join me as we continue to worship and sing to Christ Jesus, our Lord and King, no longer a baby but the one who sits on heaven's throne.

Pastor Jonathan wrote this homily for Cornerstone's Lessons & Carols Christmas Eve Service.

¹ quotegeek.com/quotes-from-movies/talladega-nights-the-ballad-o/ Accessed 12/17/18.

Christmas Eve Lesson #2 What does Emmanuel (or Immanuel) mean?

For the remaining lessons I'm going to **introduce** the songs we are about to sing. We are about to sing the Christmas Hymn ***O Come, O Come, Emmanuel***. This is a beautiful and powerful hymn with the chorus, "Rejoice! Rejoice! Emman-u-el... shall come to thee, O Isra—el." Now we're not telling Emmanuel to rejoice but we're telling God's people to rejoice because God has come to them. The chorus itself makes a lot more sense if you know what the word "**Emmanuel**" means.

The word Emmanuel appears in an Old Testament prophecy spoken **700 years** before Christ's birth.² In fact, we actually have a **hard copy** of this prophecy that **pre-dates** the birth of Jesus—***The Great Isaiah Scroll***, which is part of the **Dead Sea Scrolls** dated at **125 BC**.³

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (NIV®)

The **Hebrew** form of **Immanuel** is spelled with an "i" (יְמָנֹּוּעַל) and the **Greek** form is spelled with an "e" (Ἐμμανουήλ).⁴ What matters is not the **spelling** but **who** this verse is talking about—Jesus. The **Gospel of Matthew** actually quotes the prophet Isaiah after the **angel** appears to **Joseph**.

Matthew 1:22-23 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us"). (NIV®)

The word "Immanuel" is actually a **compound word** like "**snowflake**" which is made up of two words "snow" and "flake." "Im-manu-el" is made up of **three words**:

"Im" = with
"manu" = us
"el" = God (shortened form of Elohim)

So "Im-manu-el" literally means "with us, God" or "God with us." What the prophet Isaiah promised was that one day a virgin would give birth to a child who would literally be God with us. 700 years later Jesus fulfills that prophecy. He is **conceived** by the **Holy Spirit** and born to the virgin Mary.

Because the Holy Spirit (who is God) is Jesus' **biological father** and Mary is Jesus' **biological mother**, Jesus is actually both God and man. He's not like **Hercules** or other **Greek heroes** who are part human and part God. Jesus is **fully 100% totally God**, but also fully 100% totally **man**. And just by his birth he is fulfilling that ancient Isaiah promise that one day God would come to humankind.

So when we sing ***O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*** realize we're not just singing a nice Christmas song. We are singing that God has **fulfilled** his Isaiah promise through the birth of Jesus to come and dwell among humankind. Together, let's sing that God has come in Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us.

Pastor Jonathan wrote this homily for Cornerstone's Lessons & Carols Christmas Eve Service.

² I'm drawing on my 12/22/2013 sermon at Immanuel Church in Chelmsford MA to explain "Emmanuel."

³ The Digital Dead Sea Scrolls. <http://dss.collections.imj.org.il/isaiah> Accessed 12/18/18.

⁴ Immanuel or Emmanuel? Which is correct? <https://immanuelsothern.com/2012/12/04/immanuel-or-emmanuel-which-is-correct/> Accessed 12/18/18.

Christmas Eve Lesson #3 Why “I Heard the Bells” rings true today.

Christianity Today recently published an article on the Christmas carol “**I Heard the Bells.**”⁵ As I read it I learned that the great American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote this song as a poem during the **Civil War**, “the bloodiest war in American history.”⁶ The lyrics reflect this terrible time:⁷

*“And in despair I bowed my head;
‘There is no peace on earth,’ I said;
‘For hate is strong,
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men!’”*

I didn’t know that just a few years before this Longfellow’s **wife died** in a terrible accident that left his face scarred. That same year his **son** was also **injured** in the war. So when Longfellow wrote this poem, he was writing from a place of **deep personal pain** and **pain for his country**. If we go back to the first verse of the song, we recognize that this is not how life is supposed to be, especially at Christmas.

*I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play;
In music sweet the tones repeat,
“There’s peace on earth, good will to men.”*

Longfellow describes the tension between how Christmas **should** feel—peaceful, joyful, happy—and how life **actually** feels—there’s conflict and hurt everywhere. As we look out at our world I think this song **rings true**. Just watch or listen to the news. Whether it’s **politics** or a **tragedy** or the **economy** it seems like there are **tensions** and **conflict** everywhere. Sometimes they’re up close and personal between us and family members or friends. This is because we live in a world **marred** by **sin**.

Romans 3:10-11 As it is written:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands;
there is no one who seeks God. (NIV®)

Sin creates **disorder** and **chaos** in our world. It creates brokenness and hurt between people. But God offers a way of **healing** and **hope** for any who will **trust in Jesus Christ**.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NIV®)

So does our song sing of this hope? Longfellow was a **Unitarian**. That means he didn’t believe in Jesus like we do at Cornerstone, but he still **captured the hope** God offers in this **stanza**:

*“Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: ‘God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,*

⁵ O’Neal, Kristen. *A Carol For The Despairing*. Christianity Today. December 2018. Pages 50-53.

⁶ O’Neal, Kristen. Page 52.

⁷ These lyrics are quoted directly from the article. Casting Crowns has adapted them into a beautiful song here: <https://castingcrowns.com/music/i-heard-the-bells-on-christmas-day/>

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*The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men.’’*

As we sing this song tonight we can all **find hope in Jesus Christ**. Despite a world in a conflict, God promises that one day through Jesus he is going to **right all wrongs**. He is going to end all wars and conflict and peace and **true justice** will **reign** forever. So no matter what you’re going through this Christmas season, or how you feel about this world, I’d like to offer you hope through Jesus. Jesus is our **final and everlasting peace**. Let’s sing about this struggle and our final victory in “I Heard The Bells.”

Pastor Jonathan adapted this homily from an article published in Christianity Today. You can read the original article “A Carol for the Despairing” by Kristen O’Neal in the December 2018 issue.

Christmas Eve Lesson #4

Why do we sing Joy to the World after Silent Night?

Tonight we are singing two songs **in closing**, *Silent Night* followed by *Joy to the World*. It's pretty typical for churches to sing these one after the other on **Christmas Eve**, but **why** do we do that? Let's start with Silent Night. What's it about? It tells us of the birth of the Savior by **recounting three miracles**.

The first miracle is the birth of a child to a virgin girl. Verse **one** says, "Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child." "Yon" is short for "yonder"—like "over there."⁸ We're saying, "Look over there! The Virgin mother with her child." When we sing this line we are recounting a **miracle foretold** by a Scripture passage we already read tonight, **Isaiah 7:14**. Both the gospel of **Matthew** and **Luke** tell us Mary was a virgin when the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus within her (Matt 1:23; Luke 1:27, 34). The virgin birth is the first miracle we recount.

The second miracle is the angels appearing to the Shepherds. Verse **two** of *Silent Night* says, "Shepherd quake at the sight. Glories stream from heaven afar. Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia!" The angels come to announce the birth of Jesus. Their presence is another sign that this is **no ordinary birth**. It's supernatural. It's so special angels announce it (Luke 2:8-15).

The third miracle is that this baby is the "Son of God." Verses **two and three** say, "Christ the Savior is born... Son of God, love's pure light... Jesus Lord, at Thy birth." This baby's **mom** wasn't ordinary. She was a virgin. His **birth** wasn't normal. **Angels** announced it. This is because he wasn't an **ordinary baby**. He is God come in the flesh. He is the Savior, the Son of God, the Lord.

But did people respond to Jesus like he is the **Savior** and **Son of God**? Did the crowds **accept** him as **Lord**? No. This is why **33 years later** Jesus is **crucified** and **dies**. So **how** can we sing the **next song**? How can we sing "joy to the world" if our world **rejects** the baby who brings joy? Our world rejected him at his birth and is still **rejecting him today**.

We can sing *Joy to the World* because although we sing this song at **Christmas time**, it was not originally written to be a **Christmas song**. This hymn is based on **Psalm 98**, which speaks of the Lord's **return** at the **end of days** to both **restore** and **judge** the world.⁹

Psalm 98:4-9

4 Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;
5 make music to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
6 with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—
shout for joy before the Lord, the King.

7 Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.
8 Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;
9 let them sing before the Lord,
for he comes to judge the earth.

⁸ Silent Night. Lyrics Genius. <https://genius.com/13354286> Accessed 12/3/2018. See annotation.

⁹ History of Hymns: "Joy to the World" by C. Michael Hawn. Discipleship Ministries. The United Methodist Church. <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-joy-to-the-world> Accessed 12/3/2018.

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He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity. (NIV®)

Jesus **died** and was **buried** but three days later he **rose** again and then he **ascended** into heaven and sat down at the **right hand** of the **throne of God** (Eph 1:19-21). Right now Jesus is **ruling** and **reigning** over **all of creation** from **afar**, but one day soon he will rule and reign **up close**.

So when we sing, “Joy the world, the Lord has come” we are not actually singing about the **birth** of a precious little baby, but the **return** of **King Jesus** in final victory over sin, death, and Satan.¹⁰ So when we sing *Silent Night* we are singing of the **first coming** of Christ, his **miraculous birth**, and when we sing *Joy to the World* we are singing of the **second coming of Christ**. Lets praise God for both the **birth** of Jesus Christ and his **return** by singing *Silent Night* **followed** by *Joy to the World*.

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¹⁰ We sing about the curse of Genesis 3:17-18 being undone in *Joy to the World*.