

## "O Come, All Ye"

Service by: Reverend Doctor Tess Baumberger  
Unity Church of North Easton  
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### Introducing the Christmas Story

Two thousand years ago, the Jewish people were in great despair. For centuries, others peoples had ruled over their lands. The Seleucids, the Greeks, and then the Romans all broke their spirits. They were a poor, downtrodden people, losing hope.

Of the four gospels in the bible, only two describe the birth of Jesus. Both authors wrote about him many years after he died, trying to work out who this great man had been. The gospels are not biographies as we think of them. Biographies of famous people at the time were less concerned about historical fact than with giving a particular point of view about the person, an interpretation.

The story we will hear tonight comes from the gospel of Luke. The point of this gospel is that Jesus is a man who tells us that we can conquer the empires of this earth by building empires of the spirit.

Luke's Jesus comes to those who are in need and in despair – the common people of the day. It makes sense that in Luke's story, the first people who come to see the baby Jesus are not kings but common shepherds. This gospel also portrays Jesus as a great religious leader, which is why angels announce his birth.

Reading 1 Luke 2: 1-19

### Homily "O Come, All Ye"

In our opening hymn we sang the words, "Oh Come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant." But when we listen to Luke's Christmas story, when we contemplate the words and the deeds of this child whose birth we celebrate tonight, it seems clear to me that he did not come to those or for those who were already joyful and triumphant, did he?

Consider - was Jesus born as son and heir to the emperor in Rome? Or to Herod, the local king? Was he born to those who lived in opulence, and who wielded power? No. On the contrary, Luke's Christmas story tells us that Jesus came to the lowly, to parents who had no shelter that night but a barn, who probably had not had a decent meal, parents who were blown about by the whims of the mighty.

Was Jesus' birth announced throughout the land, by royal decree, to the princes, priests, and leaders of the people? No. The story claims that angels announced Jesus' birth. I don't know if it's true, but it makes for a cool story, especially when you consider that these angels announced his birth, not to the elite of the day, but to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay.

The author of the gospel of Luke wants us to know that from his birth, Jesus came most powerfully not to those who sit proud on thrones of power. You might think that was the case given that through the centuries, political and religious leaders have claimed to have risen to that power by Jesus's might and through his will, or through God's will.

No, the story we just heard claims that Jesus came not to stand at the elbows of the powerful, to help them amass more power. Rather, Jesus came to those and for those on the bottom rungs of the social ladder of his time.

The child whose birth we celebrate tonight grew to be a man, not who played into the hands of the proud, but who reached out to grasp the hands of the poor, the humble, to lift them from their deepest sadness and despair into new hope and self-respect.

The child whose birth we celebrate tonight came not to those who lived in richly furnished homes straight out of the Roman equivalent of House Beautiful, but to those who had humble homes, or no homes at all.

The child whose birth we celebrate tonight came not to those who are clothed in the finest, richest, latest fashions, straight out of Vogue magazine, but to those whose clothes were too tattered and thin to keep them warm.

The child whose birth we celebrate tonight came not for those whose tables are laden with every good thing, straight out of Gourmet magazine, but for those whose stomachs were empty.

The child whose birth we celebrate tonight did not come to those who were well-educated and erudite. On the contrary, he came to those who couldn't read or write.

The child whose birth we celebrate tonight came not to those who enjoyed perfect health, who were strong and able to do anything, but to those who were so ill in body or in spirit they'd lost all hope of healing.

The child whose birth we celebrate tonight did not come to those who enjoy the spoils of war, plundered from the defeated. On the contrary, he came to those who were the victims of war crimes, whose lands had been invaded, whose homes had been burned and temples desecrated.

The child whose birth we celebrate tonight grew to be a man who said, "Come to me all you who are heavy-burdened and weary, and I will give you rest." A man who said, "Blessed are you who are poor, blessed are you who are hungry, blessed are you who mourn, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, blessed are the peacemakers."

In his words and in his ministry, Jesus did not come to give more hope to those who had no need of it. He came to offer hope to those whose lives had become so hard, so difficult, that they wondered if anything good would or could ever happen to them again.

This child whose birth we celebrate tonight grew to be a man whose life and teachings centered on love and compassion, on wisdom and truth.

This child whose birth we celebrate tonight grew to be a man who lifted up a vision of a better world, an empire of the spirit, where every person treated every other person with love and respect.

Jesus lifted up a vision of a world of justice, unity, and peace - peace in our hearts, peace in our homes, peace in our country, and peace in our world. The life and words of Jesus have comforted millions of people

across our great blue earth throughout the span of 2,000 years.

This is the foundation of our joy tonight, this child who grew to preach and to live this glorious vision. This child, born in humble circumstances, whose life and teachings have brought such comfort and hope to so many, became a man who showed us how the spirit can triumph over everything.

There is no greater hope for our world than children born to see this vision, born to live it out and make it into reality, children who in and through their lives can bring peace, compassion, healing and unity to a world so much in need of peace, compassion, healing, and unity.

Luke's Christmas story tells us that such children can be born to anyone, in any circumstances. They can be born in an African village torn by war, or in a ghetto in a large city, or in a sleepy rural town like Bethlehem or, hey, even in North Easton, Massachusetts.

So come all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant.

But come also and especially all ye doubtful, sorrowful, and despondent,

Come all ye rich, well-educated, well-fed, well-clothed, and healthy,  
but come also and especially all ye poor, illiterate, hungry, cold, and ill.

Oh Come all ye excited, happy, optimistic, and proud.

Come, too, all ye grumpy, discontented, worried, and humiliated.

Oh Come, all ye who can sense that vision in your hearts,  
can sense how this world could be, the world as we can make it.

Come too, and especially all you who cannot yet see that vision.

Come all ye who wish to give birth to the world  
as Jesus and others like him have envisioned it,  
a world that rotates on an axis of love, of peace, and of justice.

Giving birth to this vision would indeed be a nativity for all the world to  
celebrate, in tones both joyful and triumphant.

The vision of that planetary nativity calls us all to come, walking, marching,  
running, dancing to behold him, born the king of shepherds, the hope of  
ages, the prince of peace.

## Closing Words

Tonight is a holy night, because people around the world are celebrating the birth of a baby who grew to be a great man who based his life on hope and love.

It is a holy night because every night a child is born is a holy night, and prophets still arise, prophets who will base their lives on hope and love.

It is a holy night because we are gathered here, and in our midst are prophets, leaders, healers, guides, wise ones, family, and friends, who base their lives on hope and love.

Let us light candles in this holy night, this silent night.

(light the candles)

O Come O Come, Emmanuel

Look around you.

Emmanuel is come.

God is with us in each other,

With us in the spaces between us,

In the memories we share,

In this holy moment,

In the future we will build together,

The sacred is with us in the empire of the spirit  
that we create here together.

It is born in all our loving relationships,

With family, with partners, with friends, with each other.

Look around you in this silent night, this holy night.

Look around you at the many faces of Love

Illuminated by the flickering candlelight.

Look around you, Emmanuel.

Look around you. Emmanuel is come.

Let us join our voices to the silent night. Let us sing

Benediction

Now let us go forth from this good place,

Uniting our flickering flames of hope

With those of good people everywhere

To build a fire that can warm the world.

