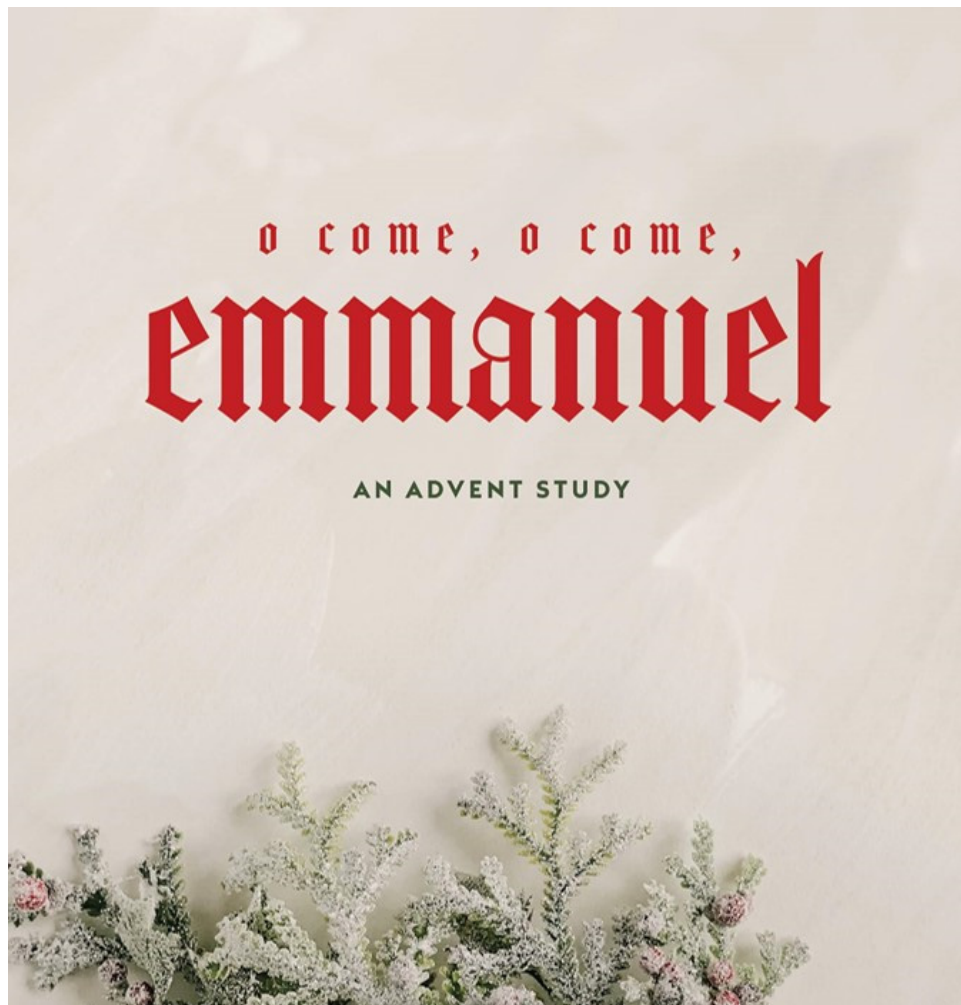


Desire of Nations

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



Prayer of Illumination

God who is with us, guide us by your Word. Help us to again receive you in the flesh. May the Promised One lead us in wisdom and truth and may we be sustained by Christ who is the Bread of Life. Amen.

Background

This 4th Sunday of Advent concludes our series upon the verses and Scriptural titles for Christ found in the Advent Carol "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

So far we've looked at:

Emmanuel—God with Us. God comes near to us in Christ—when he sent his Word in the flesh to be born in Bethlehem. Emmanuel means that God doesn't practice social or physical distancing with us. He comes close and has become one of us—yet without sin.

Next we looked at the title **Dayspring**—like a shining star at dusk or the sun rising at dawn, the appearance of Jesus is our divine breakthrough. He sends a flood of light to those who sit in shadows of darkness and reveals the path of peace for us to walk in. Because of Christmas, we have hope, even in the bleakest of times.

Last week we learned how Jesus is the **Wisdom from on High** come to earth. Jesus was not only the Word made flesh, but the Wisdom of God made flesh. Christ, the personification of God's wisdom, brings an entirely different kind of wisdom to his creation, a wisdom that's paradoxical and counter-intuitive—revealed not only in the creche at his birth on Christmas, but the cross at his death on Good Friday. Christ's wisdom is power-revealed-in-weakness. The humility of the Christ Child shows us the wisdom of foolishness—where we lead by serving and live by dying to ourselves.

Today we come to the fourth title for Christ—**Desire of Nations.**

*O come, Desire of Nations
Bind in one the hearts of all mankind
Bid thou our sad divisions cease,
And be thyself our King of Peace*

Scripture Readings

Let's hear now the Word of Lord first from the Prophet Haggai, whose name means Journey or Pilgrimage.

Haggai 2:6-7 (KJV)

"For thus saith the LORD of hosts; yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the LORD of hosts."

We have a very special guest with us today who is going to remind us what Christmas is all about with childlike simplicity—

Linus reading from Luke 2:8-14. Enjoy.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vVp5AGte_4Q

Luke 2:8-14 (KJV)

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them,

'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."

The Gospel according to Peanuts.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – Desire of Nations

There's a whole lot of shaking going on in our first Scripture reading from Haggai.

*"In a little while, I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;
and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come:"*

The shaking has not ceased. There's been a lot of shaking in our world with this pandemic and presidential elections and natural disasters. There's been a whole lot of shaking going on personally, in my family too.

On Thanksgiving Day, we got the dreaded phone call from Sarah's mom: Something terrible had happened—Jacob's dead.



Our twenty-six year-old nephew on Sarah's side of the family tragically died of what appears to be an accidental drug overdose. We were all shaken by the news—and still are.

Jacob was born to Sarah's sister when she was only sixteen years old. To Sarah and her five younger brothers, their nephew Jacob was more like a little brother. He grew up with the family. Jacob had a lot of love for the family—he was always trying to connect with family. And in the midst of our busyness we gave Jacob a lot of love— but he had a tough life. And tough things happened to him. And he just couldn't shake off his drug addiction to numb all the pain in his life.

We had an outdoor private family memorial service last Sunday in Gilbert. We've been going through the full gamut of emotions: shock, disbelief, guilt for not seeing it earlier, anguish that his life ended all too soon. Regret that we didn't do more. But in all the shaking, we've been reminded of the fragility of life. But also about the important things, like family. Not holding grudges. Forgiveness. God. And—young people, and adults, please don't do drugs.

The good news is that after the shaking, "in a little while" as Haggai says—the Desire of All Nations shall come. This is what gives us the hope when we find ourselves in "the little while" that seems more like "forever"—The Messiah shall come and visit us, "all of us" the passage says.

Jesus is not for just one kind of people—not merely the squeaky clean, but everyone. All nations. All people. The world. Happy people, grieving people. Anxious people. Lonely people. Struggling people. Us. Jesus is good news for the whole world, as the angels proclaimed:

*'Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.
For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.'*

Even in the midst of the shaking—fear not. You can be scared, but don't be afraid. When we're shaking like a leaf, we look up to the heavenly host, who proclaims, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Peace on earth. Peace in our souls—when we're shaken to the core. Peace—that's what we long for at Christmas. Really always. And good will too. And that's what Christ delivers and what Christ will deliver to us in fullness when he comes again. Advent isn't just about waiting for the First Coming of Christ, but also the Second Coming.

Maybe the shaking you've been through is different—shaken by strife going on in your place of shelter. Shaken by all the political rancor and shameless posturing. The shaking of testing positive or a loved one testing positive. Maybe you know one or more of 300,000+ who have died.

Maybe you feel the shaking of not being able to enjoy church— not singing together, eating together, praying together, or serving together in person. I mean, that's what we Christians do—right? Let's not sugar coat this—this is devastating. Zoom and YouTube are great—I thank God for them, but you and I know, it's nothing like being together in person. We'll get there—but we're not there quite yet. "In a little while" Haggai reminds us.

In this time of shaking, we need to look up. And listen up. Sometimes you need to put your ear to the ground. This is a time to put your ear to the sky and hear the angel voices in the heavenlies. You see not only the earth and the nations shaking, but when your timbers are shivering and the sky seems to be falling—look up and listen up. Join the heavenly choir that still *repeats the sounding joy* and give *glory to God in the highest—on earth peace, good will* toward men and women. Just as it is in heaven.

The shaking process opens things up—stirs up our spirit. Clears out a way. "Shake before opening," the label says. Sometimes you have to shake the ketchup, to get the sauce out. To get things moving.

The Apostle Paul tells us in the book of Philippians: *work out your salvation with fear and trembling* and even some shaking, I might add.

The Holy Spirit uses the things on earth—both good and bad—to shake us up. To stir and mix in what has settled to the bottom. What needs to rise up to the top. The Holy Spirit shakes us and rouses us from our slumber. Waking and provoking us, to look up, to change, to do what needs to be done, to course correct. To wait. To find peace, when life is on the rocks. God is making way for the Messiah to come into the mix. To break into the scene. In a little while, I will shake all nations, and the Desire of Nations shall come. Christ, the Desire of Nations, is coming to us again—giving us peace, peace to the world, even when we're shaken to the core.

So this Advent, this Pandemic, we keep waiting. Waiting for the fullness of peace, for the Prince of Peace to come back for us again. We not only sing, but we cry out:

*O come, Desire of Nations
Bind in one the hearts of all mankind
Bid thou our sad divisions cease,
And be thyself our King of Peace*

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth, as it is in heaven.

Come Lord Jesus, come. Amen.

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

*O come, O come, Emmanuel
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel*

*O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
Our spirits by thine advent here
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.*

*Come, thou Wisdom from on high,
who orderest all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.*

*O come, Desire of Nations
Bind in one the hearts of all mankind
Bid thou our sad divisions cease,
And be thyself our King of Peace*