

Sunday December 25 - Come Lord Jesus

Carol: Come thou Long Expected Jesus

Matthew 2:1-12

This morning we are here to celebrate the birth of Christ. Birthdays always seem to bring about reflection. You evaluate where you are in life right now. It is a time to take stock of your life. You think over the past year since you last celebrated your birthday. I also reflect over all the years and at times wonder how I got to this age! When I was eight or ten someone in their 60's was old. They had lived almost forever. Now that I am there the time has flown by. Some of you wish you were this young again! Yes, birthdays cause us to reflect on our past. But they also cause us to think about the future. We ponder what the next year, or two or ten might hold in store for us. Many of us have plans in the works that we hope come to fruition. Many of us also carry with us worries. How will our health, our age, our bank account impact the days to come. Yes, birthdays are a time of reflection and aspirations.

Since today is Jesus' birthday could we imagine celebrating it in a similar manner? First, as we reflect on the moment ask yourself, "Where is Jesus in your life now?" How has that changed during this past year? Has your faith deepened, has the relationships forged in this church grown, have you responded to the opportunities to be in service with joy? These are all reflective questions to ask ourselves. If, in this time of examination, you see growth over this year or many years, celebrate. If not ask yourself what can you do about it.

Sometimes what is needed is a change of attitude. The way we were in service and lived out our faith may no longer be possible because of age or health related issues. This causes some to pull back, to feel useless and distant from God. Others take stock and see what they still can do and embrace this as being exactly what God wants from them at this point in their life. Sometimes they are amazed to see how their faith and service grow in new directions.

I was just reading an Upper Room story about a woman who was always the one to help others. She had some surgery and needed help instead. It was so hard for her to

ask but when she did she was overwhelmed by the response of love from her church. She now realizes that part of her growing faith is to be a recipient of help with grace and not be afraid to ask for it. Think about it. God may be calling you to embrace help with grace and see how that deepens your love for God and others this year. To move from giving to receiving, that might be what God has in store for you.

Ultimately today, and I hope most Sundays, we come not just to reflect on the past, to evaluate the present but with hope look to the future. All during Advent I have been using carols to help us internalize the message of this day. I decided that since I talked about Christmas Carols all during the season of Advent I would use an Advent carol on this Christmas day service.

We often sing “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” but few of us realize that we are proclaiming the hopes and faith of the earliest Christians. The expression “Maranatha!” was a key watchword and prayer among the early faithful. It is an Aramaic word which is a combination of two words which literally mean “*Come, Lord!*” Paul the Apostle used this Aramaic word at the end of his First Letter to the Corinthians.

When we sing, “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” we could just as easily be saying: “Come Lord Jesus” or “Maranatha!” Have you thought about what this means for us today? What are we wishing for when we say “Come, Lord Jesus”? I believe we want those messages of Jesus, messages of peace, acceptance, generosity, kindness and compassion to become normative in our lives and the world. The early church would end their prayers, “Come Lord Jesus” because they truly wanted Jesus’ reign on earth to begin now! They believed the second coming of Christ was imminent. We no longer feel this way after the passing of so many centuries, but our desire for the reign of Christ to happen on earth is still strong. On this Christmas morning we need to see that this is more than a prayer; it is more than a carol; it is a word of challenge. We should come this day planning on making this desire a reality, at least as much as we can in our little part of the world.

Let’s be honest. It’s scary to pray “Maranatha! Come, Lord! This prayer is related to the prayer Jesus gave his disciples: “Your kingdom come.” When we pray for the

Lord's kingdom to come we ask God to send his Son, the Lord Jesus to come and reign over us as King and Lord of All. This also means that we are praying for strength to say no to temptations, courage to stand up to oppression, a willingness to forgive and so much more. Christ coming is a life changing, world changing affair. It is not talking about some day but wanting Christ to come now and the best way to do that is to start living today in the kingdom of God. Bishop Cal McConnell coined that term. Kingdoms, he said have too much to do with wealth, power and oppression. When you think about kin you think family and community. So we are to live as if all are part of the family of God, the Kingdom of God.

To do this is to acknowledge that Jesus is the hope and desire of every person and nation. This does not mean that everyone has to become a Christian, but isn't it the hope of all to live in peace and have compassion rule. In a world torn apart by fear, by terrorism and racism we all long for peace, community, love and acceptance.

Amazon has been running an ad this holiday season that features a priest and imam having a pleasant conversation over tea. As the imam prepares to leave, both men remark at their sore knees, share a hug, and part ways. Afterward, they both take out their smartphones and buy the other knee braces through Amazon Prime. The ad ends with both the priest and the imam kneeling to pray while wearing the knee braces they received from the other. Even though it's focus is to get us to buy and use Amazon products it shares how we can hold different beliefs and yet work together, have peace and acceptance of one another. This is living in the kingdom of God.

Praying Maranatha, Come Lord Jesus, is that part of our birthday reflection that points us to the future, remembering how God has been with us, is with us, and will be with us. It reminds us of how God's love has changed us and transformed us and reminds us that we are to continue to live into that love and share it with others, even those so different from us in culture or faith, as shown in the Amazon story.

Praying Maranatha, is ultimately a prayer of anticipation. It is believing, like the early church that the God of the prophets, the God who was willing to come to live among us in vulnerability is still with us. We anticipate that return, just like children anticipate Christmas morning.

Our children, like most, all of a sudden became very helpful and courteous right around thanksgiving time. They were anticipating Christmas morning and had heard the horror stories of children who misbehaved getting a lump of coal in their stockings. Finally Christmas Eve comes and we, in our house, had to have strict rules about when they could get out of bed and rush in to find their stockings and gifts under the tree. Without it, we parents would not have had any sleep. That was how great the anticipation.

Maranatha says we are living now as best we can in anticipation of the time to come. We longingly wait for God to break in anew into our lives and the world. We believe it will happen. We can hardly wait. Come, thou long-expected Jesus.