

Reflections for Advent and Christmas
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Eloise, South Baddesley School
Isaiah 9: 2
"Unto us a Child is Born."

Church of St Mary the Virgin, South Baddesley

7th December 2025

*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.*



Reflection on “O Come, O Come Emmanuel”

Advent is often described as a season of waiting, yet it is more than waiting. It is like standing on a shoreline as dawn begins to break over the horizon. The light has not yet fully come, but the first colours of hope are already stretching across the sky. Advent invites us into that in-between space: a time of reflection, repentance, longing, and expectant waiting for Christ who comes to us, past, present, and future. It is within this spirit of longing that the beautiful carol *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* speaks so deeply.

The version we know today was translated and arranged by **John Mason Neale**, an English Anglican Priest, scholar, and hymnwriter. Born in London on 24th January 1818 to Cornelius and Susanna Neale, John lost his father when he was only five years old. Perhaps this early encounter with loss shaped his sensitivity to the deep longings of the human

heart, a longing that echoes through the hymns he preserved and wrote.

Neale became renowned for uncovering and translating ancient hymns, bringing back to life the treasures of medieval Christian worship. Among these gifts is *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. Although first published in the mid-19th century, its true roots lie much deeper. Its origins can be traced to Benedictine monks in the 8th and 9th centuries who chanted the “O Antiphons”, seven titles for the Messiah inspired by Scripture. Beginning a week before Christmas, the monks would sing one antiphon each day, preparing their minds and hearts for the coming of Christ.

Neale later wove these ancient prayers into the carol we now know and love. This hymn expresses the longing of God’s people across generations. It sings of a world waiting for deliverance crying out for the Messiah using titles like Wisdom, Key of David, Dayspring, and Emmanuel, meaning “God with us.” It is a song of yearning: a plea for redemption, restoration, peace, and the end of suffering. It looks back to Christ’s first coming in Bethlehem, and forward to His promised second coming when He will make all things new.

And as we sing it today, we recognise that our own longing is not so different from that of ancient Israel. We, too, long for wisdom in a world overflowing with confusion and truth. We long for freedom where there is captivity to fear, to addiction, to injustice. We long for a light in the midst of darkness. We long for Emmanuel, “God with us”, because we know how deeply our world aches for its healing.

When we look around us today, we still see division between neighbour and neighbour, conflict across nations, and suffering borne by the vulnerable, the abused, the exploited, and the oppressed. Like the exiles of old, we long for a world where peace is not fragile but flourishing. We long for lives to be restored, relationships mended, and hope renewed. Advent tells us that this longing is not in vain. It is not simply wishful thinking. It is a holy longing placed in us by God because a better world is not only possible, it is **promised**.

And so we pray with the same ancient cry:

O come, O come Emmanuel.

Come into our world with Your healing.

Come into our hearts with Your peace.

Come into our communities with Your justice.

Come into our lives with Your transforming love.

This is what Advent means: to stand in the growing light, to let repentance soften our hearts, to let longing draw us closer to God, and to wait with hope—knowing that Christ has come, Christ is coming now, and Christ will come again in glory.

*O Come, O Come Emmanuel—and in Your coming, bring hope and peace to our hurting world. **Amen.***

14th December 2025

*God rest Ye merry gentleman let nothing you dismay,
For Jesus Christ our Saviour, was born on Christmas Day;
To save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray,
O tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy;
O tiding of comfort and joy.*



Many of the old Christmas carols were written and sung over 200-plus years ago. However, there seems to be a much older date for the carol, *"God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen."* And when we hear the proper English words of this song, we imagine, Victorian-clad men and women in puffy sleeves, carolling in perfect harmony to unsuspecting villagers. I am just thinking of: "Tiny Tim and Scrooge," and of course it will be a must watch for me over Christmas!

However, this Christmas Carol is the Gospel story taken from the second chapter of Luke with a final verse of prayer that I found to be similar to Zachariah's prayer of praise found in Luke, chapter 1, where he prophesies that the Lord, the God of Israel, would come to his people, to redeem them, who would raise up a mighty Saviour, born from the house of David.

This prayer celebrates the coming of Christ as the promised Messiah, the "rising sun" who will guide His people into the paths of peace through the forgiveness of their sins.

Zachariah gives the title and first line, *"God rest ye (you) merry"* means: *"may God grant you peace and happiness"*, but mistakenly, sung with a misplaced comma.

Alison my wife, and I always have this discussion of missed placed commas all the time; it makes it especially interesting for her, me being dyslexic.

So, what is this Carol all about? It is a message of being comforted and a message of peace as the announcement of a Saviour has been born for us, who will bring a blessing to all; "O tidings of comfort and joy" is a refrain from the traditional Christmas carol "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen", which announces the good news of Christ's birth to bring salvation and it is a message of hope, comfort, and joy for all believers. The full line, appearing in the carol's chorus, is....

"O tidings of comfort and joy" and is repeated after each of the verses describing the angel's announcement of the birth of the Saviour in Bethlehem.

So what does it say to us today? Well, the same message foretold then, is also for us today- it is a message of hope and a message of love. You see God stooped down in love through the incarnation of a child; to bring us back into relation with him.

For all too long throughout the bible from Genises to Revelation, the bible story is a story of love; and the compassion of God for His people, but we have all gone astray like the parodical son. Through Jesus, Father God opens His arms wanting to welcome us home like the periodicals we are. When we come to sing this Carol over Christmas, may you be reminded of what joy the Christ Child brings to us and blesses us with Good News. **Amen**

21st December 2025

Infant Holy, Infant Lowly, for His bed a cattle stall; Oxen lowing, little knowing, Christ the babe is Lord of all. Swift are winging, angels singing, Noels ringing, tidings bringing: Christ the babe is Lord of all, Christ the babe is Lord of all.

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them at the Inn. *Luke 2:6-7*



This particular Carol highlights the humble and unexpected birth of Jesus in a stable; a stable refers to a place, which often was part of a home or a separate structure, used for housing animals, which is inferred from the mention of a manger in the Nativity story, (a feeding trough for animals), the imagery depicts the divine mystery of God entering the world in a humble lowly way. This emphasizes the stark

contrast between Jesus' royal status and his humble surroundings, an event foretold by the prophet Isaiah. Bethlehem sits still beneath the moonlight, totally unaware that the Son of God has been born in one of its poor and lowly outbuildings. In an anonymous backstreet, tucked away out of sight, we find a draughty stable. Inside, warm with the heat of the animals, a family sits quietly-or not so quietly. Lit by a warm glow, a donkey, cow and an ox lie serene at the side of the scene-or not so serene.

The cow breathes out a gentle moo and the baby in the straw filled manger stirs. Kneeling close by Mary, Joseph and a small lamb sit in silent adoration of the child. All is calm, all is not quite right. I think we all can imagine this scene; but my guess is; yes it was an anonymous backstreet scene, where no one really took a second glance; only the small invited few, the shepherds, who told by the angels to go and see this great thing that has happened; they were seen by society as the lowly poor; men that were undesirable and unreliable; and yet God chose these few men to be the heralds of Good News of the Christ Child's birth. It is extraordinary how God is willing to choose the least, the lost the last and the lowly to accomplish his purposes.

Just a cattle shed, just a manger for his bed, but what we see is an infant holy and an infant lowly, Christ the babe is Lord of all. Will you allow this infant holy to humble you this Christmas and receive the gift of Christ? **Amen.**

24th December 2025

*Silent night, Holy night, all is calm, all is bright,
Round yon virgin mother and child,
Holy Infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace, sleep in heavenly peace.*



“Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright...”

Silent Night is probably one of the best-known and most-loved carols in the world. And yet, it began in the simplest of circumstances. Written in 1816 by Joseph Mohr and first sung in a small Austrian village on Christmas Eve in 1818, the story goes that the church organ had broken, and so the carol was performed with just a guitar. No grand choir, no fanfare—just quiet simplicity. Perhaps that is part of its enduring beauty. As the composer Franz Gruber later wrote,

it was meant to express “a gentle, timeless lullaby for the Christ child.”

When we picture that holy night in Bethlehem, we often imagine the calm serenity of this carol: a sky full of stars, a stillness wrapping around the stable like a blanket, the newborn Jesus sleeping as Mary and Joseph look on in wonder. But perhaps the reality was a little different, dusty roads crowded because of the census, a makeshift shelter filled with the sounds and smells of animals, a young Mother exhausted, a Father anxious yet trusting. And yet *in that ordinary, imperfect place*, God entered the world. Holiness wrapped itself in simplicity. Light broke quietly into the dark.

For many, Christmas is not silent. And it is certainly not always calm. For some, this season magnifies loneliness, loss, or longing. For those in hospital tonight, patients waiting for test results, staff working through the night, families anxious at a bedside, this Holy night may feel far from peaceful.

For those grieving the loss of someone dear, Christmas can sharpen the ache of absence. The empty chair at the table speaks loudly into the stillness. For others facing hardship, uncertainty, or conflict, the world does not feel bright—it feels fragile.

And yet, this is precisely the world into which Christ was born. Not a perfect world. Not a silent world. But a real one. A hurting one. “*The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight,*” another carol reminds us—because in Jesus, God steps into both our hopes and our fears.

So, what does it mean for us on this Holy night?

It means that the peace Christ brings is not about everything around us being calm—it is about God being with us in the

midst of whatever we face. It means that even when life feels anything but silent, the Christ child still whispers hope.

It means that holiness is not found only in perfect moments, but in the presence of God who draws close to us in our humanity.

Can we still find hope in the Christ child?

Yes, we can. Because the One who came in the quiet of Bethlehem comes still—to bring light into our darkness, comfort into our sorrow, strength into our weakness, and peace into the places where peace seems impossible.

So tonight, whether your world feels calm or chaotic, bright or shadowed, may the gentle words of *Silent Night* remind you that the Holy One is nearby, and may the Christ child grant you and all who watch or weep or wait this night, a glimpse of that heavenly peace. **Amen.**

25th December 2025

*Joy to the world the Lord has come, Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room; and Heaven and nature
Sing; and Heaven and nature sing, and Heaven, and Heaven
and nature sing!*



*“Joy to the world! the Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King.”*

First let me say Happy Christmas to you as we rejoice in our Saviour’s birth.

So, begins one of the most exuberant and triumphant carols ever written. *“Joy to the World”* was penned in 1719 by the great hymnwriter **Isaac Watts**, originally as a paraphrase of Psalm 98. It wasn’t first intended as a Christmas hymn, yet over time it became one of the defining songs of the season—bursting with the good news that God has come to dwell among us, and that creation itself cannot help but rejoice.

What does this hymn convey?

It is a hymn of announcement, declaration, and invitation. The Lord **has** come—not as a distant hope, but as a living reality. The world is called to receive her King, and every heart is urged to “prepare Him room.” Heaven and nature join together in a chorus of praise, for God has stepped into human history with joy, redemption, and renewal.

After the angels filled the night sky with their proclamation *“I bring you good news of great joy for all people,”* the shepherds went with haste to Bethlehem and when they saw the Christ Child lying in the manger, Scripture tells us they returned *rejoicing*, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. Their joy echoes through this carol; it is the same joy Isaac Watts sought to capture: the wonder that the Saviour has come, that God incarnate is now among us.

Charles Dickens famously wrote, *“I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.”* His beloved story A

Christmas Carol—or *Scrooge*, as many know it—reminds us how joy can break into even the hardest of hearts. Within the mistletoe and wine, candles and carols, feasts and fellowship, something deeper is happening. Light shines into darkness; Cold hearts thaw; Hope stirs again; this is the work of Christ, the One who brings joy not merely for a day, but for a lifetime and for eternity.

And so, amongst our own decorations and traditions, amidst laughter or longing, abundance or heart ache, we proclaim again: **Christ has come**. The hope and expectation of the ages have arrived. God incarnate, God with us has come for *all* people:

the weary and the wandering,
the joyful and the broken-hearted,
the poor and the powerful,
the sceptic and the seeking.

What does this mean for us?

It means that joy is not a surface emotion; it is the deep assurance that God has drawn near. It means that in Christ, the world is being renewed, our hearts, our lives, our relationships and our hope. It means that heaven's song still resounds in our world today, calling us to prepare Him room within ourselves for the coming King.

So, we end where the hymn leads us with the **sound of acclamation and thankfulness**. With creation we lift our voices: "*Joy to the world the Lord is come!*"

May our hearts prepare Him room, and may heaven and nature sing through us today. **Amen.**

28th December 2025



**Reflection on “On Christmas Night All Christians Sing.”
“The Sussex Carol.”**

*“On Christmas night all Christians sing,
to hear the news the angels bring...”*

The Sussex Carol bursts with the bright, ringing joy of Christmas. Its words were first published in the 17th century by **Luke Wadding**, an Irish bishop and hymn collector, though the text itself may be older still. The lively tune most commonly known today was collected and arranged by **Ralph Vaughan Williams**, who heard it sung in Horsham, Sussex, giving the carol its familiar name. Under his hand the melody dances, echoing the message of the hymn itself: that the birth of Christ turns sorrow into joy and darkness into light.

This Carol feels like the sudden opening of a door on a dark winter night. One moment all is quiet and cold; the next, a burst of angelic song pours in *“Good news! Great joy! Christ is born!”* It captures that moment when heaven leans close to earth and floods it with the light of God’s presence.

And perhaps that is why *The Sussex Carol* remains so powerful today. Our own world, like the world of those Bethlehem shepherds, holds shadows, uncertainty, sorrow, conflict, and unspoken burdens. Yet the message comes to us again with the same brilliant clarity: *Christ is born. God is with us. Joy has come.*

C. S. Lewis once said, **“Joy is the serious business of Heaven.”** His words remind us that the joy of Christmas is no mere seasonal cheer; it is something deep, enduring, and eternal. It is heaven’s joy breaking into our world, not because life is perfect, but because God enters our imperfection with redeeming love.

What does this mean for us today?

The Sussex Carol calls us to hear the angels' song not as a distant echo, but as a living proclamation meant for our own hearts. It invites us to let the good news lift us beyond fear and weariness. It challenges us to believe that darkness does not have the final word, that Christ’s coming brings forgiveness, peace, and a hope that no circumstance can steal. The joy of this Carol is not shallow or sentimental; it is the profound gladness of knowing that God has drawn near and will never leave us.

As we conclude, we stand with quiet gratitude. On that first Christmas night, the angels brought news that changed the world. Today that same news still changes hearts. Christ comes to break the chains of fear, to heal the broken, to lift the weary, and to light the path before us.

This is our hope.

This is our joy.

This is the good news that still sings: *“News of great joy, news of great mirth, news of our merciful King’s birth.”*

May that joy fill us, strengthen us and shine through us- this Christmas and always. **Amen.**



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*This is our hope.
This is our joy.*