

O  
come,  
O come,  
emmanuel

*A Liturgy for Daily  
Worship from Advent  
to Epiphany*



Jonathan  
Gibson

# O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

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Jonathan Gibson

May the Lord make you glad during this remembrance of  
the birth of His only Son, Jesus Christ;  
that as you joyfully receive Him for your redeemer,  
you may with sure confidence behold Him  
when He shall come to be our judge.

CHRISTMAS COLLECT FROM  
BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER (1928)

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## Preface

CHRISTMAS IS MY FAVORITE TIME OF YEAR. For as long as I can remember, I have loved the season of Christmas—the warm open fire on cold winter nights, the twinkling lights outside, the mince pies and mulled wine, the presents wrapped and waiting under the tree, the visits of family and friends. However, it is more than just the seasonal atmosphere and company that I enjoy. I love the Advent services and carol singing; I love listening to (or preaching on) Old Testament prophecies about the coming of Christ or his nativity; I love the “Carols by Candlelight” service on Christmas Eve, in which we remember that holy night in the little town of Bethlehem when the everlasting light began to shine in the dark streets. Yet despite my love for these things and my embrace of the season, I always find myself arriving at Christmas Day somewhat dissatisfied with my personal meditation on the incarnation of Christ. I have tried this or that devotional guide but am still left wanting something more orderly, something more mystery-evoking, something more *worshipful*. The book that you now hold in your hands is my attempt to improve our appreciation of the mystery we celebrate each year at Christmas.

If you are familiar with *Be Thou My Vision: A Liturgy for Daily Worship*,<sup>1</sup> then you will recognize the similarities in this book; but there are also differences. I have incorporated more worshipful elements throughout the daily liturgy to fit the season. The day now begins with a meditation on the incarnation of Christ from a prominent figure in church history; the calls to worship are tailored to the content of the day's liturgy, focused on either the first or second coming of Christ; the element of adoration is a hymn or psalm appropriate to Advent, Christmastide, or Epiphany; three alternative *Gloria Patri* hymns and two alternative Doxologies rotate on a weekly basis; the catechism questions (from Heidelberg Catechism or Westminster Shorter Catechism) are focused on the necessity, accomplishment, and application of Christ's work; the Scripture readings in Advent concern Old Testament types and prophecies of Christ's coming, followed by New Testament Nativity readings in Christmastide, before concluding with some Epiphany readings; a new praise element, in the form of an ancient Christian prayer or hymn focused on the incarnation, follows the Scripture reading; finally, the liturgy closes with a scriptural benediction and a doxological postlude (based on Psalm 72:17–19).

As will be seen, each day's liturgy has been carefully crafted for the purpose of enhancing daily worship during the season of Advent up through Epiphany so that our minds are better fixed on, and our hearts are better affected by, that great mystery of the Christian faith: God “was manifested in the flesh” (1 Tim. 3:16). My prayer is that the content, structure, and rhythms of this daily liturgy may help us to be more like

1 Jonathan Gibson, *Be Thou My Vision: A Liturgy for Daily Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021).

the shepherds and wise men on that first Christmas, who,  
upon seeing the babe lying in a manger, bowed down and  
worshiped Christ the newborn King!

Jonathan Gibson, Glenside, PA  
Summer 2022  
*Soli Deo Gloria*

PART I

PREPARATION FOR  
DAILY WORSHIP  
FROM ADVENT  
TO EPIPHANY



## Waiting for Jesus

AS EARLY AS EDEN, God's people have been a waiting people. Following the fall of our first parents, God made a promise that permanently oriented his people toward the future. God told the serpent directly, and the guilty pair indirectly:

I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring and her offspring;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel. (Gen. 3:15)

It was, in short, the promise of a coming, conquering son. The promise encapsulated every promise in the Old Testament and, as such, shaped God's people into a waiting people. This anticipatory posture can be seen throughout the Old Testament, as men and women of faith look forward to what God would do in the future through a promised son. Lamech names his son Noah in the hope that he will rescue the chosen line from the curse of sin and death (Gen. 5:29), yet it is

six hundred years before Noah enters the ark at the time of the flood (Gen. 7:6). God promises Abraham that he will make him into a great nation through a son from his own body (Gen. 12:2; 15:4; 17:16), but he has to wait twenty-five years for the birth of Isaac (Gen. 21:1–3). Isaac, in turn, has to wait twenty years for the birth of Esau and Jacob, his twin boys (Gen. 25:20, 26). Jacob works for seven years to get his wife Rachel but in the end is deceived into marrying Leah (Gen. 29:20–30), from whom he receives Judah, the son of the promised line (Gen. 29:35; 49:10). Naomi has to wait to see if her line will continue, following the death of her husband and two sons. Even when her daughter-in-law Ruth faithfully follows her back to the promised land and pursues Boaz at the threshing floor, they both have to wait to see whether Boaz will be the kinsman to redeem Ruth (Ruth 3:12–18). Their godly patience allows Boaz to negotiate his way into marriage with Ruth, from whom comes Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David (Ruth 4:18–22). It is only in Naomi’s old age that her life is restored (Ruth 4:15). Hannah has to endure years of barrenness, like the matriarchs preceding her, before the Lord opens her womb and gives her a son called Samuel (1 Sam. 1:1–20), the one who would anoint David as God’s chosen king (1 Sam. 16:1–3). However, David’s ascension to the throne does not come immediately. While he is anointed in his youth (1 Sam. 16:10–13), he has to go through several years of humiliation and suffering before his ascension to the throne at thirty years old (2 Sam. 5:4); and God’s subsequent promise to David that his son will sit on his throne forever (2 Sam. 7:12–16) is not ultimately fulfilled until the coming of his greater son, Jesus Christ—some one thousand years later. Indeed, adding up the ages in the biblical genealogies

reveals that God's promise in Eden of a coming, conquering son takes about four thousand years to become a reality.

Waiting. From the beginning of history, God calls his people to be a people waiting for the coming of his promised Son. New Testament writers capture the relief at Jesus's arrival after the prolonged wait. Luke the evangelist describes Simeon as a righteous and devout man who has been "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25). Taking Jesus in his arms, Simeon utters words that would become an integral part of Christian liturgy from the early centuries of the church—the *Nunc Dimittis*:

Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;  
for my eyes have seen your salvation  
that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and for glory to your people Israel. (Luke 2:29–32)

The prophetess Anna has a similar experience on the same day, as she gazes upon the baby Jesus. Unable to contain her excitement, she speaks about Christ "to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

The same is true at the end of Christ's life as well as the beginning. Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the Jerusalem Council, is described as one who is waiting for the kingdom of God (Luke 23:51). In the events bookending Christ's life, there is a remnant in Israel waiting for the day of salvation, waiting for the kingdom of God. The apostle Paul describes it as the "end of the ages" dawning (1 Cor. 10:11). It is a long, long wait. But it is not a minute too late. As Paul explains: "But when the fullness of time had come,

God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4–5).

Although the longings, hopes, and expectations of the coming, conquering son are met in Jesus’s first coming, it does not change the reality that God’s people are a waiting people. Following Jesus’s ascension to his Father’s right hand, New Testament believers are still called to adopt the same anticipatory posture. In his Farewell Discourse, Jesus tells his disciples that he is going away to prepare a place for them but that he will come again to bring them to that heavenly home prepared for them (John 14:3). He promises, “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18). Jesus also speaks about it in parables:

Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. (Luke 12:35–36)

The angels reiterate this truth to the apostles as they gaze upward to the sky following Jesus’s departure: “This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11). This “coming again” shapes the posture of God’s New Testament church into an anticipatory people, just like his people in the Old Testament.

The apostles reveal the same mindset when they write plainly of “waiting” for the “revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:7), for “the hope of righteousness” (Gal. 5:5), for God’s “Son from heaven” (1 Thess. 1:10), for “the appear-

ing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13), for “the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life” (Jude 21). Indeed, the apostle John closes the Christian canon with words that remind us of Jesus’s promise and our longing: “‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20)

In both dispensations of redemptive history, the people of God are defined by *waiting*. In the Old Testament, believers wait for Jesus’s first coming; in the New Testament, believers wait for his second coming. In both cases, God’s people live in the light of Christ’s advent.

The observance of Christ’s advent has been expressed in the liturgy of the Christian church for over two millennia. Each Lord’s Day as the gospel is preached or the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is administered, believers are reminded that Jesus is coming again. Whether it be the threatening word about the “day appointed” or the comforting word “until he comes,” each Lord’s Day we are reminded of the need to adopt an expectant posture. As Christians, we are waiting for God’s Son to be revealed from heaven. This has been so since the days of the apostles.

However, since the days of the early church, Christians have also observed a time in the church calendar for a more focused concentration on the second coming of Christ, known as Advent. Its origins go back to the fourth century when converts prepared themselves for baptism. As the centuries passed, the season of Advent became more directly connected to Christmas—a time to consider Christ’s second coming as Christians reflected on his first coming. Often it involved a period of fasting and prayer (Advent is also known as “Little Lent”) in preparation for the celebration of Christ’s

birth on December 25 (in the Western church) or January 6 (in the Eastern church). Contrary to popular opinion, the date of Christ's birth on December 25 is not due to a pagan holiday that has been repurposed by Christians; rather, the date is based on a belief that Christ died around the same time he was conceived. The two dates commonly held for his death are March 25 (in the Western church) and April 6 (in the Eastern church). If this was the date on which he was also conceived, then his birth would have been around December 25 or January 6, depending on the respective church tradition.

Although some of the Reformers stopped the practice of observing feast days and the fasting periods associated with them, some branches of the Reformed church kept the more gospel-oriented feast days. For example, in the Swiss Reformed church in Zürich, Huldrych Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger continued to observe Christmas, the Circumcision of Christ, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost. Under the influence of Zacharias Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, the Palatinate church did the same. In Geneva, although he did not want the day to be elevated to the same status as the Lord's Day, John Calvin adopted a "moderate course" of observing Christ's birth on Christmas Day. On one occasion, he suspended his practice of *lectio continua* to preach on Christ's nativity during the Christmas season. At the Synod of Dort in 1618–1619, the Dutch Reformed Church codified the keeping of Christmas, the Circumcision of Christ, Easter, Ascension, and Pentecost in their canons of church order (see articles 63 and 67). Today Christmas is observed in some way in most Protestant denominations, often along with Advent, as a time of meditative preparation for celebrating the birth of Christ. Of course, meditating on

the first and second comings of Christ is something we do each Lord's Day; however, there is also spiritual benefit in setting aside a period in the church calendar each year to contemplate more deliberately the two advents of our Lord.

The aim of this devotional liturgy, designed for daily worship from Advent to Epiphany, is to prepare us better for the season in which we wait in earnest for Christ's second coming while we wonder in awe at his first coming. To be clear, the season is not about what we can do for Christ by our work or prayers or fasting; rather, it is about what he has done for us in his work and prayers and fasting—a work that began in his first coming in humility and which will conclude in his second coming in glory. In the meantime, as we live between these two advents of Christ, we sing with the hymnwriter of old:

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and rescue captive Israel.





## Format of Daily Worship from Advent to Epiphany

THIS DAILY WORSHIP DEVOTIONAL consists of forty days of set liturgy for the season of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany. Traditionally, Advent begins on the Sunday between November 27 and December 3 each year, while Epiphany is observed on January 6 or the Sunday during Epiphany week. In this devotional, Advent begins on November 28 and Epiphany ends on January 6, constituting forty days in total. The order of the elements in the liturgy is fixed and repeated each day, while the content of the elements changes each day, except for the Lord's Prayer and postlude. The order and content of the elements is as follows, accompanied by a rubric to make the liturgy interactive:

### **Meditation**

*Reflect on these words about the incarnation of the Lord Jesus:*

Forty meditations from church history

### Call to Worship

*Hear God call you to worship through his word:*

Forty Scripture readings (alternating Old Testament and New Testament daily)

### Adoration

*Say or sing this praise to God:*

Forty hymns or psalms from church history relevant to Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany (a psalm occurs every seven days, except for Christmas Day)

### Reading of the Law

*Hear God's law as his will for your life:*

Seven Scripture readings (repeated weekly)

### Confession of Sin

*Confess your sins to God:*

Forty prayers from church history (a prayer by Martin Bucer is used on Christmas Day, Circumcision of Christ, and Epiphany)

### Assurance of Pardon

*Receive these words of comfort from God:*

Forty Scripture readings (alternating Old Testament and New Testament daily)

### Creed

*Confess what you believe about the Christian faith:*

Apostles' Creed | Nicene Creed | Athanasian Creed (3 parts)  
(repeated weekly in a chiasm: Apostles' | Nicene | Athanasian  
1, 2, 3 | Nicene | Apostles')

## Praise

*Say or sing this praise to God:*

Gloria Patri (traditional) | Doxology (traditional) | Gloria Patri (alternative 1) | Doxology (alternative) | Gloria Patri (alternative 2) (each repeated weekly; January 2–6 each repeated daily)

## Catechism

*Receive this instruction from one of the church's catechisms:*

Select Q&As from Heidelberg Catechism and Westminster Shorter Catechism related to the coming of Christ to save us from our sin (1–2 questions daily)

## Prayer for Illumination

*As you read his word, ask God to enlighten your mind and heart:*

Seven prayers from church history (repeated weekly)

## Scripture Reading

*Read this portion of God's word: . . .*

Select Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany readings from Old and New Testaments: Old Testament readings about the coming of Christ prior to December 22; then Nativity readings from December 22 onward, before concluding with some Epiphany readings up to January 6

## Praise

*Say or sing this praise to God:*

November 28–December 16

Liturgical prayers or praises from church history up to December 16 (repeated weekly):

Es ist ein Ros entsprungen (verses 1, 2, 4, 6) | Magnificat | Benedictus | Nunc Dimittis | Sanctus | Phos Hilaron | Corde Natus (verses 1, 2, 6, 7)

December 17–23

Liturgical Advent “O Antiphons” hymns from December 17 to 23 (one each daily)

December 24

“O Holy Night”

December 25–January 6

Liturgical prayers or praises from church history up to January 6 (repeated weekly):

Sileat Omnis Caro Mortalis | Magnificat | Benedictus | Nunc Dimittis and Sanctus | Gloria in Excelsis | Phos Hilaron | Corde Natus (verses 3, 4, 5, 9)

**Prayer of Intercession**

*As you make your requests to God, pray this prayer:*

Forty prayers from church history

**Further Petition**

- Personal
- Church
- World

**Lord’s Prayer**

*Pray the words that Jesus taught us to pray:*

Traditional or modern version (repeated daily)

**Benediction**

*Receive by faith this blessing from God:*

Seven benedictions (repeated weekly): Numbers 6:24–26 | Romans 15:13 | 2 Corinthians 13:14 | Ephesians 3:20–21 | 1 Thesalonians 5:23–24 | 2 Peter 1:2 | Jude 24–25

## Postlude

*In closing, say or sing this praise to God:*

Doxology based on Psalm 72:17–19 (repeated daily)

As in *Be Thou My Vision*, the fixed order of the elements is to aid concentration, while the variety of content in the elements is to avoid boredom. The repetition of Scripture readings, prayers, creeds, praises, benedictions, postludes (repeated every seven or forty days) encourages familiarity and memorization. If one follows this liturgy of worship each day throughout the season of Advent to Epiphany, then one will become well acquainted with the creeds of the Christian church and also historic (and seasonal) prayers throughout church history—some of which were written for corporate worship on the Lord’s Day, others of which were written for personal or family worship on any day, and still others of which were written for the season. After the set prayer of intercession, there is a time for further petitions covering personal, church, or world matters, as the individual or family desires. The Lord’s Prayer, which closes the time of intercessory prayer, may be said in whatever version with which one is most familiar. (The modern version is provided in the liturgy.) Each day’s liturgy closes with a scriptural benediction followed by a doxological postlude based on Psalm 72:17–19.

If one is using the liturgy for personal worship, then the rubric may be read silently, as if one is being led in worship. If one is using the liturgy for family worship, then the person leading may read the rubric aloud, while other family members might wish to read some of the prayers or Bible passages to ensure a collective participation. In either case, it is best practice to read the content of the elements *aloud*. This adds a level of formality that will help concentration and deepen