



Hebrews 1 starts: *"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe."* I can't think of a better way to focus our thoughts at the start of this period of looking and waiting. Jesus is the heir of all things, and by focussing on him, everything else makes sense, fits into place. God has spoken through him, and by his words in the gospels. Words that point us to God, explain what God is like, how we can find our way back to him, glorify and serve him.

Welcome

Come well, come ill.
Come sorrowing, come joyful
Just come.

Come to life that knows of death.
Come to peace that shoulders pain.
Just come.

Come hungry, come thirsty.
Come young, come old.
Come

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Song

O soul, are you weary and troubled?
No light in the darkness you see?
There's light for a look at the Savior,
And life more abundant and free.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth
will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Through death into life everlasting
He passed, and we follow Him there;
O'er us sin no more hath dominion
For more than conqu'rors we are!

His Word shall not fail you, He promised;
Believe Him and all will be well;
Then go to a world that is dying,
His perfect salvation to tell!

Helen H. Lemmel

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Music: 1922. Renewed 1950 New Spring (Admin. by / Small Stone Media BV, Holland)

Advent

Johann Hinrich Wichern (1808–1881), a Protestant pastor in Germany and a pioneer in urban mission work among the poor, is credited with being the inventor of the modern Advent wreath in the 19th century.



During Advent, children at the mission school Rauhes Haus, founded by Wichern in Hamburg, would ask daily if Christmas had arrived. In 1839, he built a large wooden ring (made out of an old cartwheel) with 20 small red and 4 large white candles. A small candle was lit successively every weekday and Saturday during Advent.

On Sundays, a large white candle was lit. The custom gained ground among Protestant churches in Germany and evolved into the smaller wreath with four or five candles known today. The large candles symbolise on successive Sundays: hope, peace, joy and love.

Streams

In advent's river
Three streams of longing meet
Of the earth
For freedom
Of my heart
For love
Deeper still of God himself
For my affection

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Song

Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
All for love's sake becamest poor;
Thrones for a manger didst surrender,
Sapphire-paved courts for stable floor.
Thou who wast rich beyond all splendour,
All for love's sake becomes poor.

Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest man;
Stooping so low, but sinners raising
Heavenwards by thine eternal plan.
Thou who art God beyond all praising,
All for love's sake becamest man.

Thou who art love beyond all telling,
Saviour and King, we worship thee.
Emmanuel, within us dwelling,
Make us what thou wouldst have us be.
Thou who art love beyond all telling,
Saviour and King, we worship thee.

Frank Houghton

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Gravity

The apple, unlike Adam,
had no choice but to fall,
Speeding to fulfil its Creator's call.
But what force drew him down to us?
He, with a starlit infinity to explore,
He, who could peer into a neutron's core,
He, who had spoken a thousand million times
And known the sulphuric spit of our self-
vaunting crimes,
He, whom we had called murderer, liar, thief,
And left for dead with enlightened relief.

What force drew him down from above
To reap the grim harvest of rebel pride,
Hammered with nails of truth denied?
What force drew him down from above?
What force but this: the gravity of love.

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Song

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain—
For me, who Him to death pursued?

Amazing love! How can it be,
That Thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

'Tis myst'ry all: th' Immortal dies:
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left His Father's throne above—
So free, so infinite His grace—
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race:
'Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

No condemnation now I dread;
Jesus, and all in Him, is mine;
Alive in Him, my living Head,
And clothed in righteousness divine,
Bold I approach th' eternal throne,
And claim the crown, through Christ my own.

Charles Wesley
© Praise Trust

Read Philemon

Teaching

- God wants to save unlikely people
- Forgiveness & reconciliation is important
- God works in mysterious ways

Prayers

Lord, in the season where every heart should be happy and light, many are struggling with the heaviness of life. We need your peace and your joy more now than ever. In a world where worry, not peace, prevails stir up that good news again, make it real in our hearts this Christmas.

Thank you for the gift of Jesus - our Emmanuel, the Word made flesh. His birth and your death sealed your promise to us for ever.

We choose, by faith, to make the good news of great joy a reality in our lives so that others can see us as lighted trees of life pointing to you this Christmas.

We pray for those who are isolated and fearful during this pandemic. For those who are suffering from covid, especially Ali and Rich. We pray for Hilary, Lin & Malcolm, and those in care homes - Mary, Kath, Nell & Ivy.

Take a moment now to pray for those you know who are in need of prayer.

Furnace

May God in whose furnace faith is forged
In whose being beauty breathes
From whose dawning darkness flees
Shine on you

May the Father whose love for you
Beats with a rhythm time itself can't stop
Whose presence in your exile
Is the promise of home
Whose certainties are deeper
Than the cellars of your city
Whose breath is life
Breathe on you

May the son whose story
Is a mirror of your own
Who has journeyed into darkness
To find a key to your prison
Who has dived the deepest oceans
To find pearls for your wisdom
Who has looked into your heart
And found a beauty worth the battle
Who has written your name
On a white stone carved in secret
Hold you

May the Spirit
Who has waited millennia to fill you
Who shaped the word that moved the wind
Of the morning that conceived you
Who holds the earth on which you stand
As a midwife holds a newborn
Who fully knows you
Wholly own you

So may God
The faithful Father
God the scarred Son
God the sculpting Spirit
Journey with you

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