CAROLS OF CHRIST'S COMING
SELECTED TEXTS

SUMMARY: A brief look at three popular carols in order of the general theme they are expressing,

I. ANTICIPATION: "O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL". From a Latin text dating at least to the 12th century, possibly to the 8th century, based on Is. 7:14. The songwriter expresses

A. A Plea for Christ to Ransom us from the captivity of sin.
Stanza 1. "O come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear."

Jesus, in His sermon in Nazareth in Lu. 4:18 quotes Is. 66:1 & applies it to Himself: *The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised...*

B. A Desire for Wisdom in the Midst of our Ignorance.
St 2. "O 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."

1. Prov. 1:20ff: "*Wisdom calls aloud outside; She raises her voice in the open squares....*

2. Prov. 8 also continues the "wisdom" theme as a personification of Christ Himself.

C. An Anticipation of the Dawning of a New Day.
St 4. "O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer Our spirits by Thine advent here; Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death's dark shadows put to flight."

1. "Dayspring": In Luke 1:77-79, when Zecharias, the father of John Baptist, gave thanks for his son John because he would prepare the way for the Christ, in whom *"the Dayspring from on high has visited us; To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace."*

2. Continuing the light & darkness theme, Zecharias quotes Isa. 9:2: *The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined*.

D. Christ as the Key of David.
St 5. "O come, Thou Key of David, come, And open wide our heavenly home; Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to misery."

1. This metaphor comes from Is. 22, where God tells disobedient Israel that He will replace their corrupt High Priest with one of His own choosing: *The key of the house of*

David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open.

2. Only one man fulfills that description: Jesus Christ, our Great High Priest, as He is called in Hebrews 4:14.

F. Christ as No Mere Man, but the same God who appeared to Moses on Mt. Sinai.
St 6. "O come, O come, great Lord of might, Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height In ancient times once gave the law In cloud and majesty and awe."

G. Christ as the Rod who springs up from the stump of Jesse, the fallen house of David, because God promised that a ruler from David's line would be the King who rules forever. Used in stanzas 3 and 7.
St 7. "O come, Thou Root of Jesse's tree, An ensign of Thy people be; Before Thee rulers silent fall; All peoples on Thy mercy call."
1. The image comes from Is. 11:10: *"And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, And His resting place shall be glorious."*

2. It's a military image: In the battle between the forces of good and evil, God's chosen people will win, because God will raise the *ensign* – the banner – the battle flag – of the Captain of their salvation high, where His people can be drawn to it and assemble for victory.

H. Christ as the Desire of nations, the Prince of Peace. We will consider the term "desire of nations" in our next song.

St 8. 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.

II. ANNOUNCEMENT "HARK, THE HERALD ANGELS SING." The stanzas are by Charles Wesley, one of our greatest hymnwriters, and most commonly set to the music of Mendelssohn. The song is based on the announcement of Christ's birth by the shepherds, in Luke 2:8-14. The song contains:
A. A message of reconciliation.
St 1. "Hark! the herald angels sing, / "Glory to the new-born King; / Peace on earth, and mercy mild; / God and sinners reconciled."
1. The theme of reconciliation is developed by Paul in Col. 1:19-21.

2. "Reconciled" is the Greek word *apokatallasso* (ap-ok-at-al-las'-so), "to bring back to a former state of harmony," as when Adam walked with God before he fell.

B. A message of deity, St. 2.
1. Christ is not merely human, a babe in a manger, but God of very God.
St 2. "Christ, by highest heav'n adored, / Christ, the everlasting Lord.."

2. His coming was perfectly in keeping with God's calendar: "Late in time behold Him come, Offspring of a virgin's womb."
Gal. 3:4: *But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son...*

3. It's the greatest mystery of all, that God Himself became a man: "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, / Hail th' incarnate Deity!"
It's the great confession of every true Christian, 1 Tim. 3:16: *By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.*

C. A message of condescension, St. 3: God stooping down to have pity on sinful man:
1. Man has a deadly sin-sickness that only God can heal – otherwise, we perish:
St 3: "Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace! / Hail the Sun of righteousness! / Light and life to all He brings, / Ris'n with healing in His wings..." The image is taken from Mal. 3:1-2: *"For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the LORD of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings...*

2. The humbling necessary on God's part is almost unfathomable (see Phil. 2:6-8): "Mild He lays His glory by, / Born that man no more may die; / Born to raise the sons of earth; / Born to give them second birth."

D. A message of God's power, St. 4:
St 4. "Come, Desire of nations, come! / Fix in us Thy humble home."
1. In Hag. 2, after 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the Jews with their own hands in the fact of great opposition had rebuilt their fallen Temple, yet it was nothing compared to the former Temple that had been destroyed, as God points out to them: *"Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?"* He then promises this small, discouraged remnant that He Himself will rebuild their Temple for them, not an earthly Temple made with hands, but a heavenly one, with Christ Himself, the Desire of Nations, in the midst of it. The Lord continues, vv. 4-7: *'Yet now be strong ... for I am with you,' says the LORD of hosts.... 6 "For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; 7 'and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts.*

2. In doing this, God will conquer the great adversary, Satan, just as He promised in the very beginning: "Rise, the woman's conqu'ring seed, / Bruise in us the serpent's head..." This is Gen. 3:15, the "first gospel" (proto-evangelium): "*And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel."*

3. When God by His Spirit enables us to appropriate that gospel by God's grace faith,

with a new heart we cry out to Him to cleanse us of sin and do a work of righteousness in us: "Adam's likeness now efface [erase, wipe out – that's the old, sinful man], / Stamp Thine image in its place: / Final Adam from above, / Reinstate us in Thy love." This is the theme of 1 Cor. 15:45, 49: *And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.... And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man.*

III. ADORATION: "JOY TO THE WORLD." The words are by Isaac Watts, who wrote over 750 hymns & was known as "Father of English Hymnody." The music is Handel's.
A. St 1: Preparing the Way of the King: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! / Let earth receive her King; / Let every heart prepare Him room, / And Heaven and nature sing."

B. St 2: A Praise Song of All Creation: "Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! / Let men their songs employ; / While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains Repeat the sounding joy."

The theme of even the inanimate creation joining the praise song to God is found in Ps. 98:4-9. *Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth; Break forth in song, rejoice, and sing praises.... 7 Let the sea roar ... 8 Let the rivers clap their hands; Let the hills be joyful together*

C. In St 3, the Beginning and End of the Curse. from Genesis to Revelation, to inspire in us the utmost praise of our great Redeemer:
1. In the beginning was the curse, brought upon the world and the human race by man's sin. "No more let sins and sorrows grow, / Nor thorns infest the ground..." The reference is to Gen. 3:17-19.

2. But for the elect in Christ, the curse is not forever: "[Christ] comes to make His blessings flow / Far as the curse is found." Rev. 22:3-5 describes the end of the curse.

D. St 4 is an Ironic Statement of Fact: He Rules the World. "He rules the world with truth and grace, And makes the nations prove / The glories of His righteousness, And wonders of His love."

1. It's a fact because God has declared it; it's ironic because we look around us & don't yet see His enemies conquered, but we anticipate it by faith.

2. 1 Jn. 3:2: *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is*.