

Father Philip's Address to St Paul's Assembly

Monday 16th December

Theme for the week: Advent - Expectation

Mark 13:33-37

Over your six years here at St Paul's College you will attend Assembly probably about 500 times and at each one of those occasions you will sing a hymn. 500 or more hymns sung by you in that time.

Some of the hymns in your red or blue hymn book or yellow supplement book you will sing more than once in those six years, some perhaps only once, and some not at all.

The choice of hymns, like the choice of readings, is not done randomly. They are chosen to fit in with the theme of the reading if possible, and also the season of the Church year. So at the moment, of course, we are in the Church Season of Advent, preparing for Christmas. It is a time when we remember the preparation for the birth of Christ, but also consider that one day Jesus will come again at the end of time.

A few weeks ago our hymns were all to do with Jesus Christ the King, in the week in which the Church celebrated Christ the King.

During the week of All Saints our hymns were about the Saints, the holy men and women who were faithful to God in their lives on earth and now rejoice in heaven.

The hymn books which you have are used in very many Anglican Churches in England and around the world. The blue hymn book is the newer updated version of the red book.

Many of the hymns will be new to you, both the words and the music – and you may be inclined to say that you “don't know them”. But the truth is that if you don't ever sing it, you will never know it. I hope that by the time you leave St Paul's you will have learnt many new hymns and come to enjoy them.

Hymn singing can be filled with difficulties, not only at Assembly, but also in Churches. First of all you need to know which book you are using, then which number you need to find. It helps if you are singing the same tune as everybody else,

and finally it is always good to finish at the same time as everyone else. As it says, it can be embarrassing to keep singing when everybody else has stopped!

HYMNS

IT IS QUITE EASY TO JOIN IN

① FIRST OF ALL FIND THE RIGHT BOOK



② THEN FIND THE RIGHT NUMBER

	+		+		+
	1		3		7 2
4		9			5
	8			6	
5		1	6		
7					9
		8	7	2	
	3			5	
6			9		4
1 8		2		3	

HYMN NUMBERS MUST BE CALCULATED BY A COMPLICATED PROCEDURE INVOLVING ADDING ROWS AND COLUMNS

③ BE SURE YOU ARE SINGING THE RIGHT TUNE



④ MAKE SURE YOU FOLLOW THE VERSE NUMBERS CAREFULLY



(IT CAN BE EMBARRASSING TO KEEP SINGING WHEN EVERYONE ELSE HAS STOPPED)

Hymns have been sung by Christians since the time of Jesus – and were also sung by the Jews. In the Bible we hear of Jesus and his disciples singing hymns on the night of the Last Supper. ¹

Why do we sing?

Well Saint Augustine once said that “He who sings, prays twice”.

The hymns are really prayers. Your red or blue hymn book is really just a book of prayers, often written as poetry. In fact a hymn book is an excellent resource to use if you ever do want to pray. You can read the words: wherever you like – in your

¹ Matthew 26:30

classroom, in the Chapel, at home in your bedroom, and as you read the words use the hymn as a prayer to God.

When we add music to them and sing them, we are praising God with our voice – and so as Augustine says, we are ‘praying twice’.

One hymn which we will be using on Wednesday is a very famous Advent hymn, called O come, O come, Emmanuel. The words of the hymn are based on seven sentences which the Church uses when it prays from the 17th December (tomorrow) through until the 23rd December in preparation for Christmas. For many hundreds of years these seven sentences have been used by monks, priests and others in the Church as a part of their worship and preparation for Christmas.

Each sentence tells us something about the Messiah – the chosen one who was to come sent by God. Jesus is, of course, the Messiah. But before he was born, people did not know what he would be like. But they all had an EXPECTATION. They all had something they were hoping for in the Messiah, in Jesus.



The first expectation, the first hope was that the Messiah would be WISDOM. ‘O come Wisdom from on high ... and teach us’.

We all want wisdom. That’s why we have schools and universities. God is Wisdom, but mankind wants to gain wisdom. But true wisdom is both love and a knowledge of God that seeks to understand, with faith. Jesus is Wisdom. He shows us God the Father and reveals His love to us.

The second expectation is that the Messiah, the chosen one of God, would be LORD. ‘O come Lord of might who ... did give the law’. Adonai is a word for Lord. In the

Old Testament we read about how God gave the law to Moses and protected and fed his people. But now in Jesus God comes to us in flesh, as a baby. A baby who will be the judge of all.

The third expectation of the Messiah is that he would be the **ROOT OF JESSE**. ‘O come Rod of Jesse ... and give victory’. The prophets tell us that the Kingdom of David would be destroyed, but not totally. Like a plant which has been cut down, a root remains in the ground. Jesus is that root which comes out of the ground with new life, just like he rose from the dead on the third day.

The fourth expectation of the Messiah is that he would be **THE KEY OF DAVID**. ‘O come Key of David and open wide our heavenly home’. Jesus is the one who has complete authority. He opens for us the door to everlasting life. He destroys death and opens for us the promise to eternal life.

The fifth expectation of the Messiah is that he would be the **DAYSRING**. The dawn, the new day, the sunrise. ‘O come Dayspring and cheer us’. Jesus would throw away the darkness of sin and give us the new light of life.

The sixth expectation of the Messiah is that he would be **KING**. ‘O come Desire of Nations, King of nations ... and fill the world with heaven’s peace’. We looked recently in the week of Christ the King at how Jesus is King of the Universe. Not like an earthly King, but he brings with him a peace which only God can give.

The seventh and final expectation of the Messiah is that he would be **EMMANUEL** – which means “God with us”. ‘O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel’.

Jesus is “God with us” because he was God, born as a human who lived and died as one of us.

(Emmanuel of course can be spelt with an I or an E).

These seven sentences, these seven hopes that the people of the Old Testament had about the Messiah have all been fulfilled. God has given us Jesus who is: Wisdom, Lord, Root of Jesse, Key of David, Dayspring, King of Nations and Emmanuel. Seven names by which Jesus was known in prophecy.

Advent is about reminding ourselves of who Jesus is and the promises God made to his people and the promises which God has kept.

When you sing that hymn on Wednesday, read the words and think about what I have just told you. In fact do that with every hymn, read the words and think about what they are saying.

And when you sing the words, you are praying the words. You are praying twice, in word and in song.

As I say, you will sing some 500 or more hymns here at St Paul's. You will never remember them all. There will be some you do like to sing, and others which you don't like to sing. Some will be new to you, some you will know well.

But our singing of hymns isn't about singing any old words. It is about using words which tell us something about our faith, and to pray them with meaning.

As you prepare for Christmas, my prayer is that you will be prepared to meet the child Jesus once again who was born for you, fulfilling the promise of God.

God made a promise to his people who hoped and prayed for that promise to come true. People had great expectations of who Jesus would be.

And God who fulfilled those expectations.

Thank you.

Let us pray.

As we take up our daily work, we turn to Christ and we ask for his blessing: **Come, Lord Jesus!**

Christ, you are the Daystar, powerfully dispelling our darkness: awaken our faith from sleep. **Come, Lord Jesus!**

Reveal your presence in the world through the lives of Christian men and women. **Come, Lord Jesus!**

Come to create a new world where justice and peace may find a home. **Come, Lord Jesus!**

End the long night of our pride and make us humble of heart. **Come, Lord Jesus!**

The words of the hymn: O come, O come, Emmanuel:

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

R: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel, shall come to thee O Israel!

O come, Thou Wisdom, from on high, and order all things far and nigh;
to us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go. R.

O come, o come, Thou Lord of might, who to thy tribes on Sinai's height
in ancient times did give the law, in cloud, and majesty, and awe. R.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse's stem, from ev'ry foe deliver them
that trust Thy mighty power to save, and give them vict'ry o'er the grave. R.

O come, Thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heav'nly home,
make safe the way that leads on high, that we no more have cause to sigh. R.

O come, Thou Dayspring from on high, and cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night and death's dark shadow put to flight. R.

O come, Desire of the nations, bind in one the hearts of all mankind;
bid every strife and quarrel cease and fill the world with heaven's peace. R