



# Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

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## HYMN MEDITATION – 3<sup>RD</sup> ADVENT “SAVIOR OF THE NATION’S COME” DECEMBER 11, 2021

If there is a word which characterizes the season of Advent more than any other, it would be the word “come.” Advent is the season of waiting – within its roughly 28-day confines dwells the expectant church – we await the day of the Lord. The hymns of Advent abound with the word “come” – most famously “*O Come O Come Emmanuel*” and “*Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*.” Other anthems contain phrases such as “*Hark the glad sound, the Savior comes, the Savior promised long*”, “*Our hope and expectation, O Jesus now appear*,” “*Angels announce with shouts of mirth, Him who brings new life to earth, set every peak and valley humming, with the word the Lord is coming*” and “*The king shall come when morning dawns and light triumphant breaks, when beauty gilds the eastern hills and life to joy awakes.*”

Most of the hymns of Advent say little about a child to be born in Bethlehem. That stands to reason – the child Jesus has already come, why sing for him to come again! Advent does not prepare us for Christmas, it prepares us for the Lord’s return again, his “2<sup>nd</sup> and final coming”, the moment when our confession “*he will come again to judge the living and dead*”, will be the sight we see. Advent directs its attention not to Bethlehem, but to Jerusalem, where after our Lord’s Ascension an angel said, in Acts 1:11 “*men of Israel, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.*” The very final words of the Bible are “*Amen. Come Lord Jesus.*”

This evening we’ll close our worship with a song entitled “Savior of the Nations, Come.” It’s attributed to Ambrose – a 4<sup>th</sup> century Bishop of Milan. His Latin text was translated into German by Martin Luther and eventually into English. Yes, it has a stanza that mentions the birth of Jesus, “*Wondrous birth, Oh wondrous child, of the virgin undefiled! Mighty God and man in one, eager now his race to run.*” But Ambrose had good reason to add that. He lived at a time when certain false teachings were running rampant in the church. There was something called Arianism that taught that Jesus, while regarded as the Son of God – was not “co-eternal” with the Father, he was not the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the Trinity – “God from God and light from light”, but distinct from the Father and subordinate to him.

At the same time something called Manichaeism was wildly popular. It originated in Persia and was attributed to a Persian mystic named Mani who concocted a very intricate system of thought that said the world was one great big struggle between good and evil, light and darkness, and most significantly matter and spirit. Good, light and the spiritual were united, as were evil, darkness and the material world. Manichaeans believed Jesus was divine, but that he never experienced human birth, as the physical realities surrounding the notions of his conception and his birth filled them with horror. The virgin birth was regarded as obscene. Since Jesus was the light of the world, where was this light, they reasoned, when Jesus was in the womb of the Virgin? Jesus the Messiah, they believed, was truly born only at his baptism, when the Father openly acknowledged his sonship – “*this is my son, whom I love*”. Well, anyway...

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Ambrose was determined contend against all that nonsense, and together with other great teachers of the faith in the 4<sup>th</sup> century like Augustine, who was his pupil, and Bishop Nicholas of Myra – our good old St. Nicholas, Ambrose set to teach the truth of the incarnation and used his song to do it, saying - *fruit in Mary's womb* – take that you Manichaeans! *Not of human seed or worth, but from God's own mystic breath* – take that you Arians! Dear people, our songs are our faith – in Latin “*lex orandi, lex credendi*” – meaning ‘*as we pray and sing, so we believe.*’

Ambrose was quite the fellow. He was a lawyer and a civil servant in the Roman government. A position that would advance his career opened in Milan in 374 and he took it and distinguished himself right away. Just months after his arrival, the Bishop of Milan died, and when a public meeting was held shortly thereafter to determine who would be the next bishop, the room in the church was full and things were getting a little contentious when one person shouted “*Ambrose is Bishop*” and soon the whole crowd was chanting “*Ambrose is Bishop.*” There was just one problem – Ambrose wasn’t a Christian – at least not yet! He was what was called a “catechumen” a confirmation student you might say, he’d begun to study the faith, but his election as bishop speeded the process up to say the least so that very day he was baptized and ordained!

Not sure that’s exactly what he had in mind when he woke up that morning, but as they say, the Lord works in mysterious ways! The blessed Ambrose served his Lord well – some attribute over 90 songs to his pen. He was a magnificent preacher – it was said his words were sweet and smooth as honey. He is the patron saint of beekeepers for that very reason. I have here a prized ordination gift from my friend Pastor Bob Dahlen, himself a beekeeper in Goodrich, MN. It’s a bust of Ambrose made of beeswax! Who needs another study bible anyway!

Ambrose, defender of the faith, preacher, hymnwriter, and beekeeper’s friend, died on April 4<sup>th</sup> in 397 – Easter Eve that year. He is known as “the father of church music” as well as a teacher and defender of the faith. But when we sing him tonight, let’s think of him simply as our brother who waits for what we await, for whom the Advent refrain was his faith and his constant hope – ‘Amen. Come Lord Jesus.’