

Hymn 196, Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

This Christmas Carol was written by Charles Wesley in 1744. It was not known by many people for many years until a very young Pastor Charles Spurgeon talked about this hymn as a part of a Christmas sermon.

More accurately, Charles Wesley wrote a two-stanza hymn which is now stanzas 1 and 4 for us, and it was not until 1978, that Mark Hunt wrote the other two middle stanzas, number 2 and 3, doubling the size of this Christmas carol.

The hymn is really a pre-Christmas poem, meaning that it looks forward to the first coming of Jesus into the world. So, the hymn is inviting us to imagine ourselves in the position of the believers in the Old Testament who longed for the fulfillment of the promises of the coming Savior.

Of course, the experience of the Old Testament believer waiting, coincides with our experience of waiting as New Testament believers. First, we re-enact, as it were, looking forward to the birth of Jesus on Christmas Day throughout the month of December, but secondly, and more importantly, we look forward to Christ's second coming into the world on the last day of history.

The opening line of Wesley's first stanza starts out by announcing the theme of the whole hymn – our longing for the arrival of Jesus. It is a longing that is expressed in the form of a prayer that is addressed to Jesus Himself, "Come, Thou long-expected Jesus..." which has also become the title. Then the rest of the first stanza exalts Christ as setting us free from fears and sins, being the person in whom we find rest, our strength, our consolation, the hope of all the earth, the desire of every nation, and the joy of every longing heart. The fourth stanza lists reasons we desire for Jesus to come – to deliver, to reign in us, and His gracious kingdom to bring, by His Spirit to rule in all our hearts, and by His merit to raise us to His glorious throne.

The way that it is written is the reverse of normal rhythm. Usually, there is unaccented syllable, followed by an accented syllable, such as a different Christmas carol, 'Good Christian men rejoice...' Here the accent begins, followed by unaccented. 'Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus, ...' The result is a sense of urgency and eagerness. In addition, notice his repetition of the word "born," emphasizing his point.

The one purpose of the poem is to awaken our longing for the arrival of Jesus, and celebrate what His coming to earth accomplished.

For many years Simeon had been longing for the arrival of Jesus, and then when he finally had the rich privilege of standing and holding the infant Jesus in his arms in the temple, he said, "...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 2:30-32) May we deepen our longing for the arrival of Jesus, as we sing all four verses.