

The First Presbyterian Church *in the City of New York*

A City Vespers

A Vespers Service of Music for Advent
with members of the First Church Choir

Sunday, December 6, 2020

WELCOME

Michael Shake, *Director of Music*

O Come, O Come Emmanuel

15th-century French; adapted and arranged by John Rutter

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These titles of the coming Christ appeared in daily Vesper antiphons sung during the week before Christmas; their roots date at least to the reign of Charlemagne. Both text and tune are the fruit of 19th-century efforts to reclaim Christian treasures from pre-Reformation sources. –from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*

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

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

O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free thine own from Satan's tyranny;
from depths of hell thy people save, and give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

Rejoice....

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer our spirits by thine advent here;
disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice....

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

Rejoice....

O come, thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heav'nly home;
make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to misery.

Rejoice....

–8th-century Latin; translation by John Mason Neale and others

“Sleepers, Wake!” A Voice Astounds Us – stanza one

harmonized by Johann Sebastian Bach

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This text is based on the parable of the wise and foolish bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1–13), but contains allusions to many other New Testament passages. Because one person created both text and tune, they combine majestically to form what is often called “the king of chorales.” –from *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal*

“Sleepers, wake!” A voice astounds us; the shout of rampart guards surrounds us: “Awake, Jerusalem, arise!”

Midnight’s peace their cry has broken, their urgent summons clearly spoken: “The time has come, O maidens wise!

Rise up, and give us light; the Bridegroom is in sight. Alleluia!

Your lamps prepare and hasten there, that you the wedding feast may share.”

–Philipp Nicolai

This 18th-century anonymous New England text uses metaphor to compare Christ to an apple tree, a tree referenced several times in Scripture. The delicate musical treatment enhances the simplicity and beauty of the text.

The tree of life my soul hath seen, laden with fruit and always green;
the trees of nature fruitless be, compared with Christ the Apple Tree.

His beauty doth all things excel, by faith I know but ne'er can tell
the glory which I now can see, in Jesus Christ the Appletree.

For happiness I long have sought, and pleasure dearly I have bought;
I missed of all but now I see 'tis found in Christ the Appletree.

I'm weary with my former toil - here I will sit and rest awhile,
Under the shadow I will be, of Jesus Christ the Appletree.

This fruit doth make my soul to thrive, it keeps my dying faith alive;
which makes my soul in haste to be with Jesus Christ the Appletree.
-Anonymous

"Sleepers, Wake!" A Voice Astounds Us – stanza two, from "Cantata 140"

Johann Sebastian Bach
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On November 21, 1731, Bach's seven-movement cantata based on this hymn was presented at the St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig, Germany. Originally an aria for tenor solo, strings, and organ, Bach later transcribed and published this movement for organ solo (BWV 645).

Zion hears the watchmen singing; her heart with joyful hope is springing; she wakes and hurries through the night.
Forth he comes, her Bridegroom glorious in strength of grace, in truth victorious: her star is risen, her light grows bright.
Now come, most worthy Lord, God's Son, incarnate Word, Alleluia!
We follow all and heed your call to come into the banquet hall.

-Philipp Nicolai

E'en So Lord Jesus, Quickly Come

Paul O. Manz
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Composed by one of the great American church musicians of the last century, this anthem is beloved by choirs around the world. Though it speaks to the truth of Advent – the light of Christ entering the darkness of our fallen world – it is also a prayer of hope and comfort, words the composer's wife penned while keeping vigil over a seriously ill young son.

Peace be to you and grace from Him who freed us from our sin. Who loved us all, and shed his blood that we might saved be. Sing holy to our Lord, the Lord, almighty God. Who was and is to come; sing holy Lord.
Rejoice in heaven, all ye that dwell therein. Rejoice on earth, ye saints below. For Christ is coming soon.
E'en so Lord Jesus, quickly come. And night shall be no more. They need no light, no lamp, nor sun. For Christ will be their All!

-Ruth Manz, based on Revelation 22

"Sleepers, Wake!" A Voice Astounds Us – stanza three

harmonized by Johann Sebastian Bach
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Lamb of God, the heavens adore you; let saints and angels sing before you, as harps and cymbals swell the sound.
Twelve great pearls, the city's portals: through them we stream to join the immortals as we with joy your throne surround.
No eye has known the sight, no ear heard such delight: Alleluia!
Therefore we sing to greet our King; for ever let our praises ring.

-Philipp Nicolai