

**Come, Thou, Long-Expected Jesus**  
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**I. Who Is Coming?**

*(v. 1) Come, Thou long expected Jesus  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.*

Once, there was a man who went fishing in the Gulf, searching for a rumored *Golden Grouper* that could grant him three wishes. For an entire week, he fished, pulling up only ordinary grouper—but so many that he had to make two trips to the tackle shop daily just to keep himself stocked with bait. At the end of the week, the tackle shop manager asked, “So, how many grouper did you bring home?”

“Not a single one,” the man replied dejectedly. “I threw them all back. None were the Golden Grouper I was searching for.”

Sometimes, we fish and wish for the wrong things. In chasing elusive dreams, we often overlook the blessings already in front of us. For some, it’s fame or recognition – earning high status yet feeling unseen and unappreciated until their name is known by all. Others pursue financial abundance, making more than 90% of Americans (and 99.9% of the world) but feeling cheated if they’re not in the top 1%.

Not all elusive dreams are driven by ego. Consider the devoted parent who constantly feels like a failure, unable to meet their impossibly high expectations. Or think of the selfless giver, whose generosity exceeds most yet never feels they’ve done enough because they haven’t sacrificed as much as a Mother Teresa.

We’ve all known people like this – and perhaps we’ve seen glimpses of ourselves in them. What is the *Golden Grouper* you are chasing that blinds you to the blessings you already have?

In my experience as a minister, the biggest *Golden Grouper* of all is often God. Many people have expectations of what God *should* or *could* do, and when those expectations go unmet, they feel disappointed, resentful, or even punished. Some reject God entirely, saying, “If God were real, this wouldn’t have happened to me,” or, “If God exists, there wouldn’t be poverty, hunger, or war.”

Yet, if we were to count all the blessings that we have experienced just between waking up in the morning and breakfast, it would take so long to count them all that we wouldn’t have any time left to consider how much God doesn’t love us, or care for us, or how a loving Creator could not possibly exist. While not everyone experiences the same

blessings you do, count yourself blessed if you woke up with a roof over your head; if you woke up in a warm bed; if there were sheets on that bed and a mattress; if your bedroom was at a comfortable temperature; if you could fill the room with light just by flipping a switch; if you had decent clothes to wear; if you had other clothes you could have worn but chose not to ... I could go on, but you get the point. Even those who live in abject poverty experience many of these same blessings.

Incidentally, if you assume that those who live in poverty are less blessed than you are, I invite you to consider the fact that, in general, people who live in poverty tend to be far more aware of their blessings than those who are wealthy. The trick with wealth is that, in general, the more you have, the more you want. So, while you may have more physical blessings than others, they're not serving as blessings if you focus predominantly on what you could have that you don't have now.

If you're spending more time asking God for what you want than giving thanks for what you have, chances are that the God you believe in also feels far off, perhaps even uncaring or judgmental. One of the reasons why those who live in countries where the poverty level is higher than ours tend to be so much happier and more sure of God's love and awareness is because they spend more time giving thanks for what they have than praying for what they don't have.

If you feel God is distant, uncaring, or judging you, try giving thanks for every blessing you have received in a single day. If you do this just once, it will be hard to assume that God is anything but close and caring.

So, when we sing *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus* during Advent, it's important to ask: *Who are we expecting?* Are we looking for the real Jesus – or a *Golden Grouper Jesus* who solves all our problems and whose highest purpose is to maintain us at or above the comfort level we've become accustomed to? Like the fisherman, we risk missing out on the greatest blessings of faith when we place our hope in the wrong vision of God.

## **II. An Unexpected, Expected Messiah**

*(v.2) Israel's strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart*

In Micah 5, we find a classic text that shaped ancient Israel's hope for a Messiah. Many churches read verses 2–4 during Advent, but a surprising “Golden Grouper” lies hidden in verse 5:

*2 But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,  
who are one of the little clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for me*

*one who is to rule in Israel,  
whose origin is from of old,  
from ancient days.*

**3** *Therefore he shall give them up until the time  
when she who is in labor has brought forth;  
then the rest of his kindred shall return  
to the people of Israel.*

**4** *And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,  
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.  
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth.*

**5** *And he shall be the one of peace.  
If the Assyrians come into our land  
and tread upon our soil,  
we will raise against them seven shepherds  
and eight rulers.*

Much of Israel's expectation for a Messiah centered on the idea of a "one of peace" who would unite the tribes and conquer their enemies. As the passage suggests: "If the Assyrians come into our land and tread upon our soil, we'll kick their butts."

But this vision never materialized. Jesus didn't unite the tribes or lead a military revolution. Instead, this Messiah was born in a germ-filled manger and later crucified by the Romans as an enemy of the state. If you were expecting a powerful military hero, like Judas did, you would have been sorely disappointed. You'd have thrown him back, just like the fisherman.

And it's not just ancient Jews who "threw Jesus back." Many modern Christians do the same. Since Jesus didn't bring peace to the world by conquering his enemies, they wait for his return to finish the job in a grand, bloody apocalypse.

But if this is the Jesus you're waiting for when you sing *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*, I wish you better luck than our fisherman had.

### **III. Heaven in the Here and Now**

*(v. 3) Born Thy people to deliver,  
Born a child and yet a King,  
Born to reign in us forever,  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring.*

So, what makes Jesus special if he's not the Messiah who conquers enemies and solves all our problems?

Last Advent, I shared an alternative translation of Jesus' first words in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. (Matthew 4:17//Mark 1:15) The traditional version reads:

*“The Kingdom of Heaven has drawn near!  
Repent, and believe the Good News!”*

This is often interpreted as a warning: “Confess your sins because the end is near, and there will be hell to pay if you don’t.”

But that interpretation neither aligns with the Greek text nor reflects the Good News Jesus came to proclaim. The word *repent* (from *metanoia*) literally means “a complete change of thought.” And the verb translated as “has drawn near” actually suggests an action already completed with ongoing effects.

A more accurate translation is:

*“The Kingdom of Heaven is already here!  
Change your whole way of thinking  
and believe the Good News!”*

Can you imagine the reaction of his first-century audience?

“How can heaven possibly be here when the Romans oppress us, poverty persists, and injustice abounds?”

Yet Jesus insists that heaven is not only a future promise but a present reality—if we’re willing to see it. He addresses objections in the Beatitudes:

Blessed are the poor...  
Blessed are those who mourn...  
Blessed are the peacemakers...

Jesus redefines heaven, not as an escape from struggle but as something discovered *within* it.

#### **IV. An Unexpected Savior**

*(v. 4) By Thine own eternal Spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By Thine all sufficient merit,  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne.*

If we expect Jesus to solve all our problems, we’re like the fisherman chasing the *Golden Grouper*. Not only do we miss the heaven already present, but we misunderstand who Jesus is.

The truth is that life’s struggles are unavoidable. But those struggles can shape us into wiser, more compassionate people—qualities that rarely emerge on Easy Street.

In my hardest moments, I've questioned my faith. My faith in Jesus has always returned because Jesus keeps showing up – sometimes as the Holy Spirit, sometimes as a friend, a solution, or an insight that seems to come from nowhere. Sometimes, he appears only as a quiet awareness that I will be okay despite how things appear. Regardless of his form, he shows up so regularly that I've given up trying to explain his presence away as mere coincidence or dumb luck.

This is why I follow Jesus. By entering human suffering, Jesus revealed a God who is not distant but *Emmanuel* – “God with us.”

So, who are you expecting when you sing *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*? Someone to remove life's challenges – or someone who walks beside you through them, come hell or high water?

This Advent and this coming year, in which the world is sure to bring a host of new challenges and obstacles, let us not pray so much for the long-expected Jesus to come – the one who will solve all our problems and conquer all the evils we face. Let's pray instead for the coming of the Christ who no one expected but showed up anyway. The one who assures us that God has been, is, and ever will be our Emmanuel, God-with-Us.