

Advent 4 – Reflection

O Emmanuel by Malcolm Guite

O Come, O come, and be our God-with-us,
O long-sought with-ness for a world without,
O secret seed, O hidden spring of light.
Come to us Wisdom, come unspoken Name,
Come Root, and Key, and King, and Holy Flame,
O quickened little wick so tightly curled,
Be folded with us into time and place,
Untold for us the mystery of grace
And make a womb of all this wounded world.
O heart of heaven beating in the earth,
O tiny hope within our hopelessness,
Come to be born, to bear us to our birth,
To touch a dying world with new-made hands
And make these rags of time our swaddling bands.



This poem is taken from Malcolm Guite’s book “Sounding the Seasons: Seventy Sonnets for the Christian Year.” It is the last of his seven sonnets based on the Advent Antiphons (you may like to follow up this reflection by reading the other sonnets in this series). An antiphon is a short phrase, usually taken from Scripture that is sung as a refrain before and after a psalm or canticle. The O antiphons are a series of seven antiphons beginning with “O” that are used in the seven days leading up to Christmas Eve, with a different antiphon proclaimed each day. Each one starts with a title for Jesus used in the Old Testament. In Latin these titles are: Sapientia, Adonai, Radix Jesse, Clavis David, Oriens, Rex Gentium, and Emmanuel—in reverse order they form an acrostic ERO CRAS which means “I am coming soon.” The English translations are: Wisdom, Leader of Israel, Root of Jesse, Key of David, Dayspring, King of the nations, God with us.

The words of the final antiphon of the series are:

O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver,
the hope of the nations and their Saviour:
Come and save us, O Lord our God.

Our pilgrimage through these Advent reflections has prompted us to reflect on change in our lives; the change that the birth of Christ brings. This sonnet emphasizes the need for change in the world with these phrases: “a world without,” “wounded world,” “our hopelessness,” “a dying world.” However, this is countered with phrases about hope and light and new birth: “spring of light,” “tiny hope,” “bear us to our birth,” “new-made hands.” The presence of God-with-us brings hope for the future and light for our darkness. We are saved by the wonderful gift of the love and grace of God. This is something so far beyond our understanding that it is a mystery.

Advent is the start of the new year for the Church, so these words of new life are appropriate for this season. We have a chance to make our “spiritual” new year resolutions. How can we strengthen our faith? What can we do to develop a closer relationship with God? How can our lives reflect God’s love to those around us, so that we bring hope to a wounded world?

Consider: What hope does the birth of Christ bring to your life? How can you pass on that hope to others?

Prayer:

Lord, you call us on our pilgrimage to follow your road to freedom.

May we not rest on that road, but follow you all the way.

Be our companion and our guide as we travel and light our way with your love and grace. Amen