* **CMO Slide**
* $1000 to portico-
	+ giving gifts to clients
* **Series Slide (Carols)**
* Christmas songs can be weird. Yes- there are the odd non-religious ones about geriatric vehicular homicide and dental trauma, or references to Wassailing and Yule Logs.
* But- also some of the hynms- Christmas carols- they can be weird and often contain lyrics that are centuries old and can reference things that you don’t understand. Or phrased in ways that are outdated.
* For example- did you know that the song “God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”

is not what many think- **“God Rest You, Merry Gentlemen”**

* Rather, the comma actually appears between the word Merry and Gentlemen
* **“God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen”**
* In other words- its not talking to Merry gentlemen, its saying to Gentlemen who are upset.
* For God to “REST YOU MERRY” means that he puts you happily at rest.
* **Back to Series Slide**
* Or how about Away in a Manger? What is a Yon Virgin anyway? Is that someone who has never been way over yonder? “oh yeah, I’ve only been Hither, never Yon. I’m a Yon Virgin.”
* And why the insistence on labeling Jesus like something you’d yell into the Drive-thru at Zaxby’s. “YEAH, I’ll take the 4 piece Zax Snack- Tender and Mild please. With Ranch.”
* And you ever notice how once you get past day 7 of the 12 days of Christmas the thing literally turns into to human trafficking? I mean at one point the recipient ends up with 36 ladies dancing given to her as a gift. This is NOT OK and I won’t stand for this sickening injustice!
* So, our aim together over the next 3 weeks is to expose some of the meaning of the carols we sing- in here…and everywhere.
* Each week- the carol that we talk about- we will also sing.
* So today is “O come, O come, Emmanuel”.
* I love that we’re looking at this song coming right out of Hebrews, because I think this IS the Christmas song that the writer of Hebrews would sing to that Hebrew Church.
* This is the most Jewish Christmas song that exists. And honestly, when we lose the Jewish roots of Christmas- or Christianity- you actually lose a big part of the Christmas story.
* In fact, and this is remarkable, the entire song could be written if all you had was the Old Testament.
* Look at the names given to Jesus in this song and where they come from in the Bible. All Old Testament.
* **Immanuel- Isaiah 7**
* **Son of God- Psalm 2**
* **Wisdom- Proverbs 2-3**
* **Lord of Might on Sinai- Exodus 19**
* **Branch of Jesse’s Stem- Isaiah 11**
* **Bright and Morning Star-Isaiah 14**
* **King of Nations- Jeremiah 10**
* **King of Peace- Isaiah 11**
* Today, we’re going to look at this Christmas carol, probably the oldest one you sing on a regular basis. It may date back as early as the 9th century…and certainly goes back to the 12th century.
* And its author remains an anonymous mystery. Which- is not unlike the author of the book of Hebrews we just finished.
* So, in the spirit of both of those authors. Lets firmly plant ourselves in the OT story from which the word Immanuel emerges…so we understand in fuller context what’s happening when Matthew quotes it in his gospel in reference to Jesus.
* **“O Come, O Come Immanuel: Why Christmas Needs to Keep a Minor Key”- Isaiah 7, Matthew 1:18-25**
* Additionally, this is one of only 4 popular Christmas songs that are sung in a Minor Key that I could find.- the other 3 being “We Three Kings” and “What Child is This?” and “Carol of the Bells”.
* So Minor Key Christmas Carols are rare- and understandably so.
* Major key songs are typically more triumphant and joyful. And that is what a carol is. It's a song of joy. Which seems to make a lot of sense for Christmas.
* But not if you read Isaiah…or Matthew’s account of Christ’s birth- the context in which the name Immanuel is given.
* The events that surround the name Immanuel in the Scripture are somber and troubling…definitely minor key carols.
* Lets start with Isaiah 7, the origin of the Title for Jesus “Immanuel”.
* Where one question emerges naturally from the text- What does Isaiah 7 have in common Murfreesboro Roads and Dostoyevsky novels?- One character will have about 4 names- which makes the whole thing very confusing.
* So let me fix a complicated scene with some slight over-simplification.
* God’s people, Israel, are divided into 2 countries. The North is called Ephraim. The south is called Judah.
* Ephraim has teamed up with Syria (also called Aram here) and are threatening to attack Judah. Judah is also called “the House of David”- because it's the tribe that King David belonged to.
* Judah’s King is named Ahaz. Now, what we find out in the book of 2nd Kings- is that Ahaz, who is really afraid of getting conquered by the tag-team duo of Syria and Ephraim, has used the Gold of the temple to hire the Assyrians- to fight with them.
* So- the basic storyline is that Ahaz has placed his trust in a pagan king and his army to defend Judah…instead of trusting God to protect them.
* Now- we gonna do something a little different this morning. Usually, I read the text then go back and reference it as I explain it to make a larger point.
* Today- I’m going to read Isaiah 7 and comment on it as we go through the text- and then I’ll make a couple points at the conclusion of that.
* **Isaiah 7**
* **2 When it became known to the house of David that Aram had occupied Ephraim, the heart of Ahaz and the hearts of his people trembled like trees of a forest shaking in the wind.**
* **3 The Lord said to Isaiah, “Go out with your son Shear-jashub to meet Ahaz at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, by the road to the Launderer’s Field. 4 Say to him: Calm down and be quiet. Don’t be afraid or cowardly because of these two smoldering sticks, the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram, and the son of Remaliah. 5 For Aram, along with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has plotted harm against you. They say, 6 ‘Let’s go up against Judah, terrorize it, and conquer it for ourselves. Then we can install Tabeel’s son as king in it.’ ”**
* Ok- translation- Isaiah says to Ahaz- “The kings of Ephraim and Aram are a couple of lame has-beens. They have this plan- to take over Judah and then put in a sucker as king- one who they know they can control. But don’t freak out because…”(and then Isaiah continues)
* **7 This is what the Lord God says:**
* **It will not happen; it will not occur.**
* **8 The chief city of Aram is Damascus,**
* **the chief of Damascus is Rezin**
* **(within sixty-five years**
* **Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people),**
* **9 the chief city of Ephraim is Samaria,**
* **and the chief of Samaria is the son of Remaliah.**
* **If you do not stand firm in your faith,**
* **then you will not stand at all.**
* So now Isaiah is telling him, “YHWH is telling you that neither of the countries will even exist in 65 years. They don’t have staying power. They won’t conquer you. They will lose…
* …unless of course…
* you don’t trust Yhwh…and I don’t know…maybe make a deal with a pagan king for protection.”
* In other words- what seems on the surface the best way to protect yourself- by hiring a stong army- is actually the way to defeat.
* And what seems like a surefire loss, just resisting them with the army you have…well- that weaker position.. is actually how you win this thing. Trust YHWH, not some temporary Pagan King.
* **10 Then the Lord spoke again to Ahaz: 11 “Ask for a sign from the Lord your God ​— ​it can be as deep as Sheol or as high as heaven.”**
* **12 But Ahaz replied, “I will not ask. I will not test the Lord.”**
* YHWH says to Ahaz through Isaiah- “I know its hard to trust me in this. So ask for any sign you want- and I’ll give it to you.”
* Ahaz comes back in hypocrisy and self-righteousness- with “No I will not test the Lord.” Meanwhile, he has already struck up a deal with Assyria. But he’s acting like he’s super committed to YHWH. Basically- he doesn’t need a sign from God- because he doesn’t think he needs YHWH’s help. He is pretty confident that the Assyrians will bail him out.
* Now- there are 2 ways to test God in Scripture- one of them is good- one is bad. The good testing is to do what he says, even when it seems counter-intuitive.
* The bad testing is like what Israel constantly did in the Exodus. Its NOT doing what God says to see if he’ll do something about it.
* Its like Kevin in Home Alone “Hey God, I’m eating junk food and watching rubbish- you better come out and stop me!”
* But YHWH is looking for Ahaz to test him in the right way. To test his word to see if he’ll make good on his promise of protection and salvation. YHWH wants him to be like Kevin later in Home Alone- to come out from under the bed, go out Judah’s front porch and yell to those Northern Kings “Hey I’m not afraid anymore! Did you hear me I’m not afraid anymore!”
* Now, Isaiah is about to put Ahaz in his place. He’s gonna tell him, “Oh, bro, God is fidda give you a sign whether you want it or not. But now- its going to be a sing not only of salvation- its also going to be a sign of Judah’s judgment.”
* **13 Isaiah said, “Listen, house of David! Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men? Will you also try the patience of my God? 14 Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: See, the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel. 15 By the time he learns to reject what is bad and choose what is good, he will be eating curds and honey. 16 For before the boy knows to reject what is bad and choose what is good, the land of the two kings you dread will be abandoned. 17 The Lord will bring on you, your people, and your father’s house such a time as has never been since Ephraim separated from Judah: He will bring the king of Assyria.”**
* He says- the very king you thought would be your salvation- the King of Assyria- is going to oppress you. And then the rest of the chapter is about the economic and agricultural demise of Judah under the hand of their false savior- the King of Assyria.
* **7:14**
* Now- you heard right in the middle of all this- the famous Christmas verse- the virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel (which means God with us). That’s the sign.
* In this context- it simply means a kid will be born to a young woman…and he will represent God’s presence with Judah during this invasion. And by the time he’s old enough to choose between right and wrong- the armies of these 2 kings will be done for. Just watch the kid grow up- and you’ll watch Syria and Epraim fall apart…But Judah- at that time- you will be dominated by this pagan Assyrian King that you got into bed with instead of trusting YHWH.
* Not exactly Tidings of Comfort of Joy is it?
* Ok, now- lets go to the Gospel of Matthew.
* **Matthew 1:18-25 & 2:13b-(Start at “an angel”)14**
* **18 The birth of Jesus Christ came about this way: After his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, it was discovered before they came together that she was pregnant from the Holy Spirit. 19 So her husband, Joseph, being a righteous man, and not wanting to disgrace her publicly, decided to divorce her secretly.**
* **20 But after he had considered these things, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, don’t be afraid to take Mary as your wife, because what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will give birth to a son, and you are to name him Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”**
* **22 Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:**
* **23 See, the virgin will become pregnant**
* **and give birth to a son,**
* **and they will name him Immanuel,**
* **which is translated “God is with us.”**
* **24 When Joseph woke up, he did as the Lord’s angel had commanded him. He married her 25 but did not have sexual relations with her until she gave birth to a son. And he named him Jesus.**
* **2:13b**
* **an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “Get up! Take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. For Herod is about to search for the child to kill him.”**
* Transition: Now- I’m gonna make 2 points today.
* **1) Fear seeks strength & control APART FROM GOD. Faith requires commitment & accepts weakness WITH GOD.**
	+ The song “O Come, O Come Immanuel” is a song of longing.
	+ Of mourning- and waiting.
	+ **O come, O come, Immanuel,
	and ransom captive Israel
	that mourns in lonely exile here
	until the Son of God appear.**
	+ Its very much like Ahaz and Judah in Isaiah 7- up against an impossible military force- Or Joseph in Matthew’s Gospel- underneath the weight of a heart-breaking and impossible pregnancy and calling to love and protect Mary and Jesus from Herod’s murdering army.
	+ The song is in a minor key- because neither of the situations surrounding the use of the name “Immanuel” are very happy and upbeat.
	+ The song is about WAITING for comfort. WAITING for joy.
	+ Its not a song of NOW. It's a song of UNTIL.
	+ Lonely Exile UNTIL the Son of God appear.
	+ So Ahaz and Joseph are in a similar situations.
	+ And the message from God is very similar
	+ **Isaiah 7:4a (end at “quiet”)** **& Matt 1:20b (start at “Joseph” and end at “wife”)**
	+ But the reaction is very different.
	+ Ahaz resists God’s sign. And resists God’s plan for his salvation.
	+ Because God’s plan sounds too weak.
	+ God’s plan is just “listen to this old prophet and his son. And then sit around watching this child until he’s old enough to tell right from wrong”
	+ The strong play is to go with the King of Assyria who can do something NOW about Judah’s situation.
	+ A weak little child and an old prophet don’t stand a chance against the Syrian soldiers. I’ve got to fight power with power.
	+ **Isaiah 7:12**
	+ But- per usual with God’s people…we know we can’t come out and say stuff like that. We have to spiritualize the choices that fear drives us to.
	+ So he makes it sound like his decision to not ask God for a sign shows that he is honoring is God.
* **Back to 1)**
	+ But he’s not. He’s a fake. A hypocrite. He doesn’t trust YHWH. He is unwilling to wait in weakness. He is unwilling to commit to YHWH. He refused to receive YHWH’s comfort because YHWH’s comfort was not powerful or immediate. It was weak…and deferred.
	+ It was minor key. It would force Ahaz to long and mourn. To sing O come, O come Immanuel. He’d have to be sad- GOD FORBID. He wanted to listen to 94.1 FM the FISH- He wanted positive and encouraging. He wanted God’s Not Dead- OT edition. He wanted to put his enemies in their place. He wanted to flex on socials.
	+ But God was calling him to simply look for a baby to be born- and then wait for a deliverance that he didn’t really know how it would happen. That wasn’t good enough for Ahaz.
	+ So Ahaz never really made it to the chorus of “O Come, O Come Immanuel.”
	+ He never had the real strength to sing the words “Rejoice. For Immanuel will Come.” Because he didn’t really believe “God WITH US” in the middle of mourning.
	+ He needed control. He needed to DO SOMETHING about the situation. And so- God WITH US- Immanuel- meant nothing to him.
	+ For most of us- when we are motivated by fear- we seek the same control and strength- and because of that- we completely miss the presence and comfort of God. We don’t need him. We don’t need to look for him. We don’t need signs of his presence. We don’t need to rely. We don’t need to wait.
	+ We need to do, do, do, do, and do more. We need to insist to everyone around us that “We’re okay. We’re strong. We have a plan.” And then we rattle off some spiritual cliché like “God got me”.
	+ **Isaiah 7:13**
	+ But listen. Empty spiritual- Ahaz-like phrases don’t sit well with God…and like Isaiah- the people of God sniff that out and call it what it is. Trying the patience of not only other people- but God himself. Which is a REALLY bad move.
	+ But Joseph is different.
	+ **Matt 1:24-25**
	+ Joseph’s response to the Immanuel prophecy is quiet commitment.
	+ In the middle of a scary situation- that means ostracization from his community- it means lonely exile for Joseph. Because ain’t nobody trying to believe that Mary is a virgin who got pregnant because of God’s Holy Spirit.
	+ Joseph will be seen as doing the unrighteous and foolish thing. He won’t be honored as a hero, but condemned as sinner.
	+ But Joseph is willing to take that on. Because to him- its more important that he experiences IMMANUEL. God with us- even when my community seems to abandon me.
	+ **Matt 2:14**
	+ And then, when the stakes raise- when he finds out HEROD- THE KING- is out to KILL Jesus- he loads up his family and travels by foot over 400 miles to Egypt. All because he treasures God with Us…more than power and control.

**Back to 1)**

* + Joseph accepts weakness…and makes a commitment to it. He marries Mary. And he leaves his home. He loses control. He opens his hands.
	+ Its hard. Its painful. There is mourning.
	+ But in the end- Jesus lives- and Herod dies.
	+ The child grows- and Herod is eaten by worms.
* Faith says “yes to weakness.” Faith says yes to small children over powerful kings. Faith- in the face of evil and threat- doesn’t buck up and say, “Watch me flex”- it says, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death- IMMANUEL- God is with me.”
* Rejoice, Rejoice- Immanuel shall come to you.
* Don’t let fear talk you into flexing. That’s Ahaz.
* Instead, like Joseph- Commit yourself to God’s way. The way of weakness. The way of hope deferred.
* TRANSITION:One more thing-
* **2) False saviors promise a lot up front, but take everything later. Lasting salvation comes slowly.**
	+ Do you know how Ahaz’s reign ended? He was eventually taken over by the Assyrians- the ones he thought would help him.
	+ But even before that- He was always looking not to YHWH- not to YHWH’s pattern in preserving Israel thorugh out their history- like in the desert Exodus.
	+ **2 Chronicles 28:3**
	+ Instead he was always looking at the other nations that YHWH had helped Israel overcome. Included in that- was the evil practice of sacrificing children on the altar of a false god.
	+ This is a despicable act of power over weakness. The powerful kill the weak thinking they will preserve their way of life by it.
	+ Kings killing children so they can remain kings.
	+ It's an act of fear. Its what the pagan Herod did…and sadly, its what Ahaz the King of Judah decided to imitate.
	+ And yes- this has a connection to abortion.
	+ Abortion is no less than human beings who are afraid. And in that fear- they kill children. Weaker human beings- who threaten their control over their lives. Men and Women guilty of this.
	+ Listen to me- people that I love.
	+ If you have had an abortion- you are loved by God. You are not less.
	+ At the same time, the solution is not to say abortion is OK.
	+ The solution is to trust the baby that HEROD tried to kill- for through Immanuel- you have forgiveness and salvation.
	+ But abortion is one of many false saviors. Things we think will get us out of our pain and mourning. That seem to promise an immediate fix…yet end us up in deeper pain and trouble.
	+ That was early in Ahaz’s reign. It didn’t work. The compromise he thought would help- only resulted in putting him in worse situations. But he did not learn his lesson-
	+ **2 Chronicles 28:22-23**
	+ **2 At the time of his distress, King Ahaz himself became more unfaithful to the Lord. 23 He sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which had defeated him; he said, “Since the gods of the kings of Aram are helping them, I will sacrifice to them so that they will help me.” But they were the downfall of him and of all Israel**
	+ Once again- the gods he thought would save him…ended up costing him everything.
	+ **Matt 2:23**
	+ But Joseph, is different. He doesn’t fall for the temptation of power- which would not have led him to adopt Jesus- rather to abandon him.
	+ And in so doing- by trusting IMMANUEL. By committing himself to God’s promise, even in the middle of the attack from a king- God settles Joseph and his family- and once again fulfills his promise.
* **Back to 2)**
	+ This is the nature of false saviors. Of powerful solutions. Of easy money.
	+ Think of payday loan places.
	+ If you are in a bad situation financially- Payday loan places promise a sort of immediate salvation.
	+ GET THE MONEY YOU NEED NOW!
	+ But the interest is exorbidant. In fact, it should be criminal.
	+ And that interest rate- that balloons quickly- its always in small print.
	+ God’s promise is large print. Its everywhere. Its on every page of this Bible.
	+ Its in the song. Listen.
	+ **O come, O Branch of Jesse's stem,
	unto your own and rescue them!
	From depths of hell your people save,
	and give them victory o'er the grave**.
	+ **O come, O Key of David, come
	and open wide our heavenly home.
	Make safe for us the heavenward road
	and bar the way to death's abode**
	+ **O come, O Bright and Morning Star,
	and bring us comfort from afar!
	Dispel the shadows of the night
	and turn our darkness into light.**
	+ The promise is big and bold.
	+ Immanuel will give us victory over the grave. He is the key to our heavenly home. He will dispel the shadows and night and turn darkness to light.
* **Back to 2)**
	+ But the whole thing is in a minor key.
	+ And we just don’t want to wait through our lives in a minor key. We want our lives to be “Joy to the World to the Lord is come.”
	+ Not “that mourning in lonely exile until the Son of God appears.”
* + But this song- and the Scripture it comes from- teach us that Salvation is slow. That God makes good on his promises.
	+ And that your patience- your faith- will not be in vain.
	+ Think about God’s plan of salvation.
	+ Think about how long the OT is compared to the new.
	+ Think about how this child was born- and then for 30 years no one heard from him.- and then, in the gospel of Matthew, when he finally does grow up- the first thing he does is walk into the desert for 40 days to be tempted by the devil WITH NO FOOD OR WATER.
	+ AND Then he spends 3 years with a bunch of absolute losers who rarely get anything right just walking around healing people or preaching about the Kingdom of God.
	+ And then- at the climax of his ministry- when he finally is being recognized as a Messiah- he dies at the hands of another king Herod.
	+ All that- before he resurrects and starts the church that he calls “the body of Christ”.
	+ See, God’s salvation is slow. Its deliberate. Its deferred.
	+ But that doesn’t mean you are alone in the waiting.
	+ The very body of Immanuel- his church- we are here to walk with one another through the Minor Key.
	+ God is very present with you in the valley of the shadow of death. But don’t act self-righteous…and appeal to your own power- and push away the sign of his presence- the weak people who rely on his strength. The church. The people of the church are not your saviors. That is Jesus.
	+ But the church are the people who will help keep you focused on your savior- when the minor key of your life is tempting to sell out for lesser saviors that promise everything up front…and cost you everything in the end.
	+ What are you false saviors?
	+ Who are you relying on for salvation?
	+ Jesus Christ died for every one of your sins. Every one of the times you have replaced God with a false savior. HE was crucified for that. He felt the pain…he took the result of your betrayal. He died for your Ahaz like idolatry…so you could live like Joseph…walking in humble faith. Rejoicing- even as Herod looms large.
* **Lords Supper Slide**
* A supper that is supposed to celebrate.
* Its sung in a minor key- but with a promise of future hope
* Finish with song.
* **O come, O come, Immanuel,
and ransom captive Israel
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.**

 **Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
shall come to you, O Israel.**