

*Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming  
From tender stem hath sprung!  
Of Jesse's lineage coming,  
As men of old have sung,  
It came, a flow'ret bright,  
Amid the cold of winter,  
When half spent was the night.*

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.  
– Inspired by Isaiah 11:1*

As a professional musician, there have been many, many Advent and Christmas seasons that I have ushered in with a mixture of childlike wonder and clenched teeth. As much as I love this season, when my job is to bring cheer and hope to everyone else, I can get to the end of the day (or month, as it were), and sometimes feel like Pagliaccio, the sad clown. No matter what, I have to put on the costume and smile because the show must go on. If I'm not careful, the meaning of Advent, the true Song of Advent, can get put on the back burner and sometimes even snuffed out because I'm just trying my best to get through the next gig, party or concert. As much as I consider it a privilege to use my musical gifts to spread the joy of Christ, self-preservation sometimes kicks in and my humanness takes over.

We do not have to look very far to know that the current situation in our country and our world is particularly bleak. Politically, we are more divided than ever. As a society, many of our fellow citizens have decided that it is easier to ignore and deride the stranger rather than welcome them. We have brothers and sisters in California that have recently lost everything in the wildfires, and many of us even have friends and relatives who are still recovering from Harvey, a year later. As the hymn says above, we are definitely “in the cold of winter,” and in the middle of a long, desolate night.

All of this being said, how amazing is it that you and I have already received the good news of the coming of Christ? Through all the drudgery of this busy season, we as Christians are so fortunate to know that we have already received the greatest gift, the most beautiful Song, as we live in the knowledge that Jesus has already overcome the world. Isaiah's prophecy came true all those years ago when God gave us a savior in the form of a helpless baby, the child of refugee parents who had no choice but to give Him the humblest of beginnings. The rose bloomed in the dead of winter, a promise quietly fulfilled in the middle of a cold night. As the bearers of this precious knowledge, I challenge myself and you to spread the Song of Advent with renewed joy in your heart. My music will have renewed hope, my song renewed strength. Let us celebrate Christ's coming with such excitement that we are unable to keep it to ourselves. Peace to you in this Advent season.

### **Read Isaiah 11:1-5 (from which this song is inspired) and Discuss as a group:**

1. Advent derives from the Latin word *adventus*, which means “coming”. What do we learn about the king who the Jews were expecting? (who we now know is Jesus)
2. What do we learn/can we infer about how we, as ambassadors for Christ, should live in 21<sup>st</sup> century America following Jesus' example?
3. In this season, do you feel these verses have relevancy to the things currently going on in your life? The city of Houston? Or the world?
4. What attributes of Christ listed do you want to pray specifically that the Spirit would give you this week? What attitudes towards the world do you need to adjust and how can you practically make a goal towards that end this week?