

O ANTIPHONS: AN EXPLANATION

In the historical church's *Liturgy of the Hours*, Evening Prayer, also known as Vespers, always includes the great prayer of Mary known as the *Magnificat*. Each day, the *Magnificat* is preceded by a short verse or "antiphon" that links the prayer to the feast of the day or the season of the year. In the last seven days of Advent (December 17-24), the antiphons before the *Magnificat* are very special. Each begins with the exclamation "O" and ends with a plea for the Messiah to come. As Christmas approaches the cry becomes increasingly urgent.

These moving "O Antiphons" were apparently composed in the seventh or eighth century when monks put together texts from the Old Testament, particularly from the prophet Isaiah, which looked forward to the coming of our salvation. They form a rich, interlocking mosaic of scriptural images. The great "O Antiphons" became very popular in the Middle Ages when it became traditional to ring the great bells of the church each evening as they were being sung.

Each of the O Antiphons highlights a different title for the Messiah: O Sapientia (O Wisdom), O Adonai (O Lord), O Radix Jesse (O Root of Jesse), O Clavis David (O Key of David), O Oriens (O Rising Sun), O Rex Gentium (O King of the Nations), and O Emmanuel. Also, each one refers to the prophecy of Isaiah of the coming of the Messiah. A particularly fascinating feature of the O Antiphons is that the first letter of each invocation, when read backwards, forms an acrostic in Latin: the first letters of Sapientia, Adonai, Radix, Clavis, Oriens, Rex, and Emmanuel in reverse form the Latin words: ERO CRAS. These can be understood as the words of Christ, responding to his people's plea, saying "Tomorrow I will be there."

Saying the O Antiphons as a family, whether during grace at meals, in front of the manger scene, or in front of the Christmas tree, is a wonderful Advent devotion. To make this devotion even more fruitful, read and meditate together on the Scripture texts on which the antiphons are based.

December 17th:

O Sapientia (Is. 11:2-3; 28:29): "O Wisdom, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner. O come to teach us the way of truth."

December 18th:

O Adonai (Is. 11:4-5; 33:22): "O Adonai and leader of Israel, you appeared to Moses in a burning bush and you gave him the Law on Sinai. O come and save us with your mighty power."

December 19th:

O Radix Jesse (Is. 11:1, 10): "O stock of Jesse, you stand as a signal for the nations; kings fall silent before you whom the peoples acclaim. O come to deliver us, and do not delay."

December 20th:

O Clavis David (Is. 9:6; 22:22): "O key of David and scepter of Israel, what you open no one else can close again; what you close no one can open. O come to lead the captive from prison; free those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."

December 21st:

O Oriens (Is. 9:1): "O Rising Sun, you are the splendor of eternal light and the sun of justice. O come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."

December 22nd:

O Rex Gentium (Is. 2:4; 9:5): "O King whom all the peoples desire, you are the cornerstone which makes all one. O come and save man whom you made from clay."

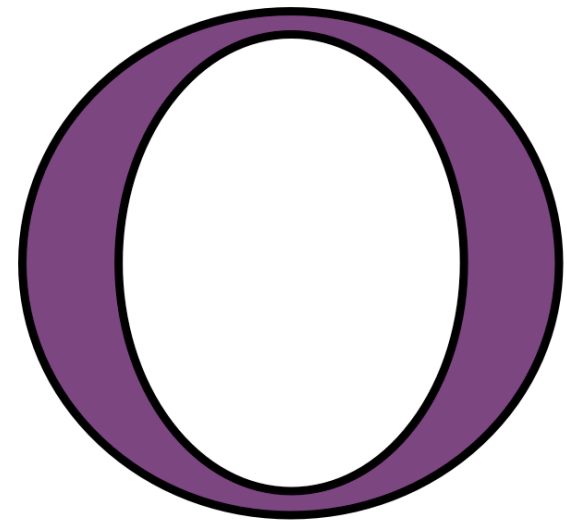
December 23rd:

O Emmanuel (Is. 7:14) : "O Emmanuel, you are our king and judge, the One whom the peoples await and their Savior. O come and save us, Lord, our God."

Adapted from: http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/801/o_antiphons_of_advent.html (December 17, 2012)

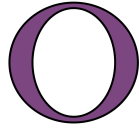


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CELEBRATING THE O ANTIPHONS

December 17 - December 23



MAGNIFICAT (LUKE 1:46-55)

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
for He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
the Almighty has done great things for me,
and Holy is His Name.

He has mercy on those who fear Him in every generation.
He has shown the strength of His arm,
He has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich He has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of His servant Israel for He has
remembered His promise of mercy, the promise He made
to our fathers, to Abraham and His children for ever.

O COME, O COME, EMMANUEL

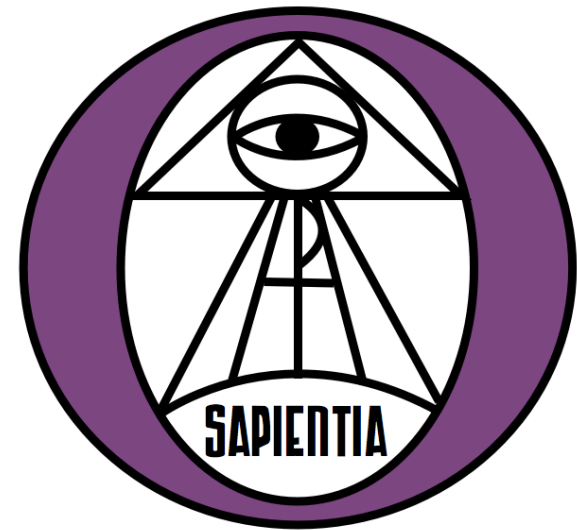
O Come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.

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

DECEMBER 17

ANTIPHON: O SAPIENTIA

O Wisdom, you came forth from the mouth of the
Most High, and reaching from beginning to end
You ordered all things mightily and sweetly.
Come and teach us the way of prudence.



O WISDOM

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who orders all things mightily,
to us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.

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

DECEMBER 18

ANTIPHON: O ADONAI

O Lord and Ruler who appeared to Moses in the flame of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come, and redeem us with outstretched arms.



O LORD AND RULER

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, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

DECEMBER 19

ANTIPHON: O RADIX JESSE

O Root of Jesse that stands for an ensign of the people, before whom the kings keep silence and unto whom the Gentiles shall make supplication: Come, to deliver us, and tarry not.



O ROOT OF JESSE

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse's stem,
From every foe deliver them
That trust Thy mighty power to save,
And give them victory over the grave.

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

DECEMBER 20

ANTIPHON: O CLAVIS DAVID

O Key of David and scepter of the house of Israel, who opens and no man shuts, who shuts and no man opens: Come, and bring forth the captive from his prison, he who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death.



O KEY OF DAVID

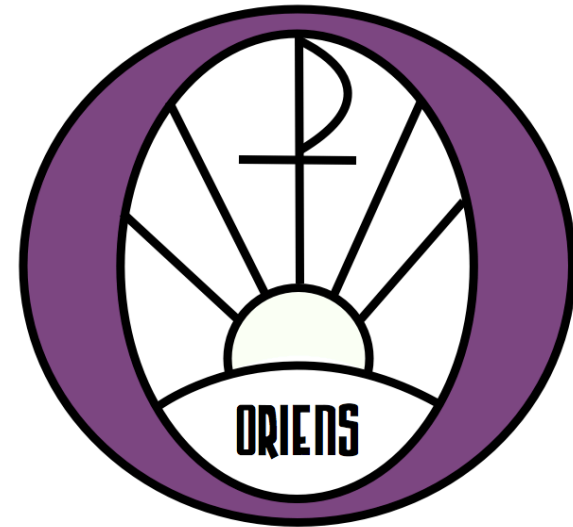
O come, thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.

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

DECEMBER 21

ANTIPHON: O ORIENS

O Dayspring, brightness of light eternal, and sun of justice: Come, and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.



O DAYSPRING

O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadow put to flight.

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

DECEMBER 22

ANTIPHON: O REX GENTIUM

O King of the Nations and their desired One,
the cornerstone that makes both one: Come,
and deliver man, whom you formed out of the
dust of the earth.



O KING OF NATIONS

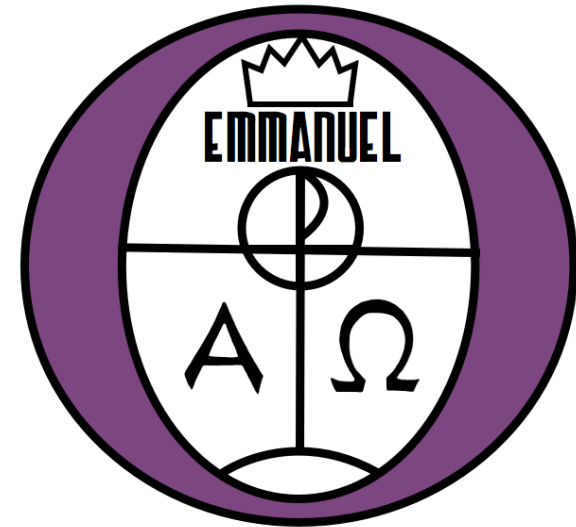
O come, Desire of nations, bind,
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of peace.

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

DECEMBER 23

ANTIPHON: O EMMANUEL

O Emmanuel, God with us, our King and
lawgiver, the expected of the nations and their
Savior: Come to save us, O Lord our God.



O EMMANUEL

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.

