



Praying the O Antiphons

SEVEN EVENINGS BEFORE CHRISTMAS

DECEMBER 17 TO DECEMBER 23

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The Seven Great O's

The O Antiphons are seven short prayers sung at Vespers, the evening prayer of the Church, on the last seven days of Advent, before and after the Magnificat, the song of Mary. Each one calls on Christ by a title taken from the Old Testament, most of them from the prophet Isaiah, and each ends with the same word: come.

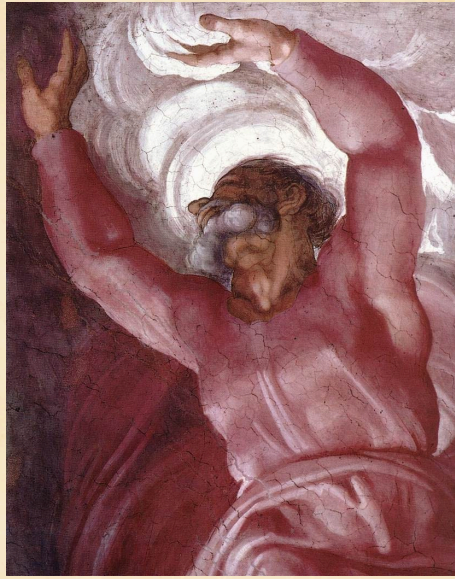
They are more than a thousand years old. Centuries later they were gathered into a Latin hymn, which John Mason Neale put into English in the nineteenth century as *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*.

Pray one antiphon each evening, beginning on December 17. Light your Advent wreath if you have one, read the antiphon slowly, then the Scripture and the short reading, and end with the prayer. Children can look at the painting first and find the sign of the day: the light, the fire, the tree, the key, the dawn, the kings, the angel.

Then read the first letters of the Latin titles from the last day to the first: Emmanuel, Rex, Oriens, Clavis, Radix, Adonai, Sapientia.

Ero cras

In Latin, *Tomorrow I will be there*. The answer is complete on December 23, and the next day is Christmas Eve.



DECEMBER 17

O Sapientia

O *Wisdom, who camest forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end and ordering all things mightily and sweetly: come, and teach us the way of prudence.*

O Sapientia, quae ex ore Altissimi prodiisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem, fortiter suaviterque disponens omnia: veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

Wisdom reacheth from one end to another mightily: and sweetly doth she order all things.

WISDOM 8 : 1

The first antiphon begins before the beginning. The Wisdom that ordered the world on the first day, when light was divided from darkness, is the Word who will lie in a manger within the week. Ask today for the prudence to set one thing in your own life back in order.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Wisdom of the Father, come and teach us the way of prudence. Order our days in thy peace, and make us ready for thy coming. Amen.

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DECEMBER 18

O Adonai

O *Adonai, and Leader of the house of Israel, who didst appear to Moses in the flame of the burning bush, and didst give him the law on Sinai: come, and redeem us with an outstretched arm.*

O Adonai, et Dux domus Israel, qui Moysi in igne flammae rubi apparuisti, et ei in Sina legem dedisti: veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.

For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us.

ISAIAH 33 : 22

Adonai, Lord, is the word Israel spoke aloud in place of the holy Name. The God no one could see spoke to Moses from a fire that did not consume the bush, and Moses bent to take off his sandals, because the ground was holy. Before you pray today, put down one thing you carry in with you.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Adonai and Lawgiver, come and redeem us with thine outstretched arm. Write thy law upon our hearts. Amen.

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DECEMBER 19

O Radix Jesse

O Root of Jesse, who standest as a sign for the peoples, before whom kings shall shut their mouths, to whom the nations shall make their prayer: come to deliver us, and tarry now no longer.

O Radix Jesse, qui stas in signum populorum, super quem continebunt reges os suum, quem Gentes deprecabuntur: veni ad liberandum nos, jam noli tardare.

And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious.

ISAIAH 11 : 10

Painters showed it as a tree growing from the sleeping Jesse, father of King David, with the kings of Israel in its branches. It is a family tree of saints and sinners, and God grafted his Son into it. Pray today for your own family, as it really is.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Root of Jesse, come to deliver us, and tarry no longer. Bless our families, with all their branches. Amen.

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DECEMBER 20

O Clavis David

O *Key of David, and Sceptre of the house of Israel, who openest and no man shutteth, who shuttest and no man openeth: come, and lead the prisoner out of the prison house, him that sitteth in darkness and in the shadow of death.*

O Clavis David, et sceptrum domus Israel, qui aperis, et nemo claudit, claudis, et nemo aperit: veni, et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris, et umbra mortis.

And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

ISAIAH 22 : 22

In the fresco the door of the dead lies flat on the ground, a demon crushed beneath it, and Christ takes Adam by the hand. No lock holds against this key. Name the door in your life you believe is shut for good.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Key of David, come and lead us out of every prison. Open what we cannot open, and close what must be closed. Amen.

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DECEMBER 21

O Oriens

O Dayspring, splendour of the light eternal and sun of justice: come, and give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol justitiae: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris, et umbra mortis.

The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

ISAIAH 9 : 2

This antiphon falls on the longest night of the year in the northern world. In the painting the stable is almost dark, and the light on Mary's face, on the angels and on the ox comes from the Child. From tonight the days grow longer. Ask him to shine where you sit in the dark.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Dayspring and Sun of justice, come and give light to all who sit in darkness. Shine on those we love who cannot see thee. Amen.

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DECEMBER 22

O Rex Gentium

O King of the nations, and their Desired One, the cornerstone that maketh both one: come, and save man, whom thou didst form from the clay.

O Rex Gentium, et desideratus earum, lapisque angularis, qui facis utraque unum: veni, et salva hominem, quem de limo formasti.

Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation.

ISAIAH 28 : 16

The painter fills the road to Bethlehem with horses, hunting dogs and courtiers from every land, and the oldest king kneels in the dust before the Child. The King of the nations makes both one, near and far, rich and poor. Pray today for someone you find it hard to stand beside.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, King of the nations, come and save us, whom thou didst form from the clay. Make all thy people one. Amen.

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DECEMBER 23

O Emmanuel

O *Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Expected of the nations and their Saviour: come to save us, O Lord our God.*

O Emmanuel, Rex et legifer noster, expectatio Gentium, et Salvator eorum: veni ad salvandum nos, Domine, Deus noster.

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

ISAIAH 7 : 14

The last antiphon gives his name at last: God with us. Fra Angelico painted this Annunciation at the top of the stairs of his friary, where every brother passed it on the way to his cell. Tonight, read the seven titles backward, and see what the Church has been answered all week.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us, come to save us, O Lord our God. Tomorrow, be with us. Amen.

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