

O Antiphons

Each evening, in the Church's Evening Prayer from the Liturgy of the Hours, we sing the magnificat, the canticle of Mary (Luke 1:46-55). In this great song of praise, Mary sings of God's blessings and his great, saving presence ad action in her life.

An antiphon is sung before the canticle. This is a short verse which, unique to each day, is meant to provide focus for this sung prayer. During the last week of Advent, these verses are taken from the collection of prayers that date back to the seventh century. They are known as the O Antiphons because each one begins with that most simple of exclamations, "O!"

Most of us know these antiphons because they comprise the verses of the well-known song, "O Come O Come Emmanuel." Each verse - or antiphon - is a prayer unto itself. Each one first addresses Christ, using an ancient title from scripture. The prayer continues with the request that Christ will come and save us. In each of these prayers, the Church expresses the very heart of our Advent Prayer: Lord Jesus, come! Save us! Redeem us, again!

The O Antiphons begin on December 17th. Perhaps families might pray them together as they gather for their evening supper. Parish groups can use them as a gathering prayer if they have reason to meet this week. Anyone can use them throughout the week to help prepare them selves in this final week before celebrating Christmas. Find a copy of "O Come O Come Emmanuel" and each night pray a different verse. In these last days of Advent, call upon the one for whom we wait and pray, in faith and in hope, to come!

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17 December 2016

"O Wisdom" (*O Sapientia*)

The blessing of Judah is fulfilled in Jesus, born of the line of David. In Christ all shall be blessed.

18 December 2016

"O sacred Lord" (*O Adonai*)

A descendant of David, born to Mary and Joseph, will govern with justice and pity the lowly and the poor.

19 December 2016

"O Flower of Jesse's stem" (*O radix Jesse*)

What mighty deeds! As an angel announces the birth of Samson, so, too, Gabriel heralds the birth of John.

20 December 2016

"O Key of David" (*O clavis David*)

The Immanuel is a blessing and a sign for David's house; his role is accomplished perfectly in Jesus.

21 December 2016

"O Radiant Dawn" (*O Oriens*)

Elizabeth hears Mary's greeting and is glad and exults. With the advent of the Savior, born of Mary, the winter is past and new life is upon us.

22 December 2016

"O king of all the nations" (*O Rex gentium*)

Hanna's thanksgiving for her son is echoed in the great hymn of Mary, the Magnificat.

23 December 2016

"O Emmanuel"

Jesus is Immanuel, "God with us", risen from the dead. He is the King of glory.

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Blessing Of A Christmas Manger Or Nativity Scene

God of every nation and people,
from the very beginning of creation
you have made manifest your love:
when our need for a Savior was great
you sent your Son to be born of the Virgin Mary.
To our lives he brings joy and peace,
justice, mercy, and love.

Lord,
bless all who look upon this manger;
may it remind us of the humble birth of Jesus,
and raise our thoughts to him,
who is God-with-us and Savior of all,
and who lives and reigns forever and ever.
Amen.

—From *"Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers"*

Blessing Of A Christmas Tree

Lord our God,
we praise you for the light of creation:
the sun, the moon, and the stars of the night.
We praise you for the light of Israel:
the Law, the prophets, and the wisdom of the Scriptures.
We praise you for Jesus Christ, your Son:
he is Emmanuel, God-with-us, the Prince of Peace,
who fills us with the wonder of your love.

Lord God,
let your blessing come upon us
as we illumine this tree.
May the light and cheer it gives
be a sign of the joy that fills our hearts.
May all who delight in this tree
come to the knowledge and joy of salvation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

—From *"Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers"*

