

Praying the “O” Antiphons

Kathy Kuczka

Amid the excitement of the final days of Advent, the Church offers the faithful another way to deepen their yearning for the birth of the Lord. The “O” Antiphons are used at Evening Prayer before and after the Magnificat from December 17 to 23. They also form the verse for the Gospel acclamation at daily Mass during that same time period.

The “O” Antiphons are ancient biblical images and titles taken from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament that foretell the coming of the messiah: O Wisdom, O Lord and Ruler, O Flower of Jesse’s stem, O Key of David, O Radiant Dawn, O King of all the nations, O Emmanuel. These titles are best known from the song “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

At home, pray the “O” Antiphons as the Advent wreath is lit using the first antiphon, O Wisdom, on December 17, and continuing with the other antiphons each day through December 23. Each antiphon begins with the image or title and ends with a specific prayer intention. Repeating the word “come” deepens our longing for Jesus.

While most of these images are rooted in the Book of Isaiah, there are other scriptural passages in which they are based. End the prayer with a verse of “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” Continue the prayer by making a Christmas ornament based on each image and hang them on the Christmas tree or place them near the creche.

December 17: O Wisdom, O holy Word of God, / you govern all creation with your strong yet tender care: / Come and show your people the way to salvation. (Scriptural references: Sirach 24:3; Wisdom 8:1; Isaiah 11:2–3; 28:29; 40:3–5; Proverbs 8:1–36; John 1:1–5)

December 18: O Sacred Lord of ancient Israel, / who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush, / who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain: / Come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free. (Scriptural references: Exodus 3:2; 6:2–3, 6, 12; Isaiah 33:22; 63:11–12; Micah 6:4; Acts 7:30–31)



December 19: O Flower of Jesse’s stem, / you have been raised up as a sign for all peoples; / kings stand silent in your presence; / the nations bow down in worship before you. / Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid. (Scriptural references: Isaiah 11:1, 10; Isaiah 5:15; 52:15; Habakkuk 2:3; Romans 15:12; Hebrews 10:37)

December 20: O Key of David, O royal Power of Israel, / controlling at your will the gate of heaven: / Come, break down the prison walls of death / for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death; / and lead your captive people into freedom. (Scriptural references: Revelation 3:7; Isaiah 22:22; 42:7; Jeremiah 13:13; 51:19; Matthew 4:16; 16:19; Luke 1:79)

December 21: O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: / Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness / and the shadow of death. (Scriptural references: Isaiah 9:1; 58:8; 60:18–20; Zechariah 6:12; Malachi 4:2; Luke 1:78–79; John 8:12; Hebrews 1:3; Revelation 22:16)

December 22: O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart; / O Keystone of the mighty arch of man: / Come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust. (Scriptural references: Isaiah 2:4; 11:10; 28:16; Psalm 47:8; Jeremiah 10:7; Daniel 7:14; Haggai 2:8; Romans 15:12; Ephesians 2:14, 20)

December 23: O Emmanuel, king and law-giver, / desire of the nations, Savior of all people: / Come and set us free, Lord our God. (Scriptural references: Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 7:14; 8:8; 33:22; Matthew 1:23; 1 Timothy 4:9)

(Scriptural references taken from the web site <https://catholic-resources.org/Lectionary/Advent-O-Antiphons.htm>.)

The “O” Antiphons are ancient biblical titles that foretell the coming of the messiah.

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