



# O Antiphons

*A time of active waiting and  
eager anticipation for  
Christ's coming*

For centuries, in anticipation of celebrating the coming of Christ at Christmas, Jesus' presence with us here and now, and His future return in glory, the Church has prayerfully cried out each day in the final week before Christmas Eve, "*O Come!*" through prayers known as "*The O Antiphons.*"

"Antiphon" is Latin for "response." These prayers are responses to the Messianic titles that were prophesied by Isaiah. The seven Antiphons are:

1. **Sapientia** (O Wisdom) *Isaiah 11:2-3; 28:29*
2. **Adonai** (O Lord) *Isaiah 11:4-5; 33:22*
3. **Radix Jesse** (O Root of Jesse) *Isaiah 1:1; 11:10*
4. **Clavis David** (O Key of David) *Isaiah 9:6; 22:22*
5. **Oriens** (O Rising Sun) *Isaiah 9:2*
6. **Rex Gentium** (O King of the Nations) *Isaiah 2:4; 9:6-7*
7. **Emmanuel** (God with us) *Isaiah 7:14*

The first letters of the Antiphon titles, read from last to first, form a Latin acrostic, "Ero Cras", meaning "*Tomorrow, I will be [there].*"

What follows are the O Antiphon prayers, listed by date. They are preceded by the passage(s) from Isaiah they are based on, a sonnet by the poet Malcolm Guite from his book *Sounding the Seasons*, and in some cases, related passages from the New Testament.

May this help you look forward to the return of Jesus. **Revelation 22:20** *Come, Lord Jesus!*

## O Wisdom - December 17

### **Isaiah 11:2-3**

*And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.  
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.  
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,*

### **Isaiah 28:29**

*This also comes from the LORD of hosts;  
he is wonderful in counsel and excellent in wisdom.*



Poem:

O Sapientia

I cannot think unless I have been thought,  
Nor can I speak unless I have been spoken;  
I cannot teach except as I am taught,  
Or break the bread except as I am broken.  
O Mind behind the mind through which I seek,  
O Light within the light by which I see,  
O Word beneath the words with which I speak,  
O founding, unfound Wisdom, finding me,  
O sounding Song whose depth is sounding me,  
O Memory of time, reminding me,  
My Ground of Being, always grounding me,  
My Maker's bounding line, defining me:  
Come, hidden Wisdom, come with all you bring,  
Come to me now, disguised as everything.

**Colossians 2:1-3** *For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you ... and for all who have not seen me face to face, <sup>2</sup>that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, <sup>3</sup>in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Prayer:

**O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to end, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of wisdom.**

## O Adonai - December 18

### **Isaiah 11:4-5**

*but with righteousness, he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips, he shall kill the wicked.  
Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.*

### **Isaiah 33:22**

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



Poem:

O Adonai

Unsayable, you chose to speak one tongue;  
Unseeable, you gave yourself away;  
The Adonai, the Tetragrammaton\*,  
Grew by a wayside in the light of day.  
O you who dared to be a tribal God,  
To own a language, people and a place,  
Who chose to be exploited and betrayed,  
If so you might be met with face to face:  
Come to us here, who would not find you there,  
Who chose to know the skin and not the pith,  
Who heard no more than thunder in the air,  
Who marked the mere events and not the myth;  
Touch the bare branches of our unbelief  
And blaze again like fire in every leaf.

\* The Tetragrammaton combines four Hebrew letters to form the ancient Hebrew name of God, YHWH. This name demonstrates God's self-existence and self-sufficiency and is how God described himself to Moses in **Exodus 3:14** *God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM."*

Prayer:

*O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.*

## O Root - December 19

### **Isaiah 11:1 & 10**

*There shall come forth a shoot  
from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.  
...<sup>10</sup>In that day the root of Jesse,  
who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—  
of him shall the nations inquire,  
and his resting place shall be glorious.*



Poem:

O Radix

All of us sprung from one deep-hidden seed,  
Rose from a root invisible to all.  
We knew the virtues once of every weed,  
But, severed from the roots of ritual,  
We surf the surface of a wide-screen world  
And find no virtue in the virtual.  
We shrivel on the edges of a wood  
Whose heart we once inhabited in love,  
Now we have need of you, forgotten Root,  
The stock and stem of every living thing  
Whom once we worshipped in the sacred grove,  
For now is winter, now is withering  
Unless we let you root us deep within,  
Under the ground of being, graft us in.

**Romans 15:8-13** *For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,<sup>9</sup> and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name."<sup>10</sup> And again it is said, "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people."<sup>11</sup> And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him."<sup>12</sup> And again Isaiah says, "**The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.**"<sup>13</sup> May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

Prayer:

*O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer: Come and deliver us, and delay no longer.*



## O Key - December 20

### **Isaiah 9:6**

*For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given;  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,  
and his name shall be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

### **Isaiah 22:22**

*And I will place on his shoulder the key  
of the house of David. He shall open,  
and none shall shut; and he shall shut,  
and none shall open.*



Poem:

O Clavis

Even in the darkness where I sit  
And huddle in the midst of misery  
I can remember freedom, but forget  
That every lock must answer to a key,  
That each dark clasp, sharp and intimate,  
Must find a counter-clasp to meet its guard.  
Particular, exact and intricate,  
The clutch and catch that meshes with its ward.  
I cry out for the key I threw away  
That turned and over turned with certain touch  
And with the lovely lifting of a latch  
Opened my darkness to the light of day.  
O come again, come quickly, set me free,  
Cut to the quick to fit, the master key.

**Revelation 1:17-18** *"Fear not, I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup>and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.*

Prayer:

*O Key of David and scepter of the House of Israel; you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open: Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*

## O Dayspring - December 21

### **Isaiah 9:2**

*The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness,  
on them has light shone.*



Poem:

O Oriens

First light and then first lines along the east  
To touch and brush a sheen of light on water,  
As though behind the sky itself they traced  
The shift and shimmer of another river  
Flowing unbidden from its hidden source;  
The Day-Spring, the eternal Prima Vera.  
Blake saw it too. Dante and Beatrice  
Are bathing in it now, away upstream . . .  
So every trace of light begins a grace  
In me, a beckoning. The smallest gleam  
Is somehow a beginning and a calling:  
'Sleeper awake, the darkness was a dream  
For you will see the Dayspring at your waking,  
Beyond your long last line the dawn is breaking.'

**Luke 1:76-79** *And you, child (John the Baptist), will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, <sup>77</sup>to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, <sup>78</sup>because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby **the sunrise shall dawn upon us from on high** <sup>79</sup>to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.*

**John 8:12** *Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

Prayer:

**O Dayspring, splendor of light eternal and sun of righteousness: Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.**

## O King - December 22

### **Isaiah 2:4**

*He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.*

### **Isaiah 9:6-7**

*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

Poem:

O Rex Gentium



O King of our desire whom we despise,  
King of the nations never on the throne,  
Unfound foundation, cast-off cornerstone,  
Rejected joiner, making many one:  
You have no form or beauty for our eyes,  
A King who comes to give away his crown,  
A King within our rags of flesh and bone.  
We pierce the flesh that pierces our disguise,  
For we ourselves are found in you alone.  
Come to us now and find in us your throne,  
O King within the child within the clay,  
O hidden King who shapes us in the play  
Of all creation. Shape us for the day  
Your coming Kingdom comes into its own.

**Philippians 2:8-11** *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup>so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Prayer:

*O King of all the nations, the only joy of every human heart, keystone of the Church: Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay.*

## O Emmanuel - December 23

### **Isaiah 7:14**

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



Poem:

O Emmanuel

O come, O come, and be our God-with-us,  
O long-sought with-ness for a world without,  
O secret seed, O hidden spring of light.  
Come to us Wisdom, come unspoken Name,  
Come Root, and Key, and King, and holy Flame,  
O quickened little wick so tightly curled,  
Be folded with us into time and place,  
Unfold for us the mystery of grace  
And make a womb of all this wounded world.  
O heart of heaven beating in the earth,  
O tiny hope within our hopelessness,  
Come to be born, to bear us to our birth,  
To touch a dying world with new-made hands  
And make these rags of time our swaddling bands.

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

*O come, Thou Wisdom from on high, Who orders all things mightily; To us the path of knowledge show, And teach us in her ways to go.*

*O come, O come, Thou Lord of might, who to thy tribes on Sinai's height, in ancient times did give the law, in cloud, and majesty, and awe.*

*O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from Satan's tyranny; From depths of hell Thy people save, And give them victory over the grave.*

*O come, Thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly home, make safe the way that leads on high, that we no more have cause to sigh.*

*O come, Thou Dayspring, come and cheer, Our spirits by Thine advent here; Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And death's dark shadows put to flight.*

*O come, Thou King of nations bring, an end to all our suffering. Bid every pain and sorrow cease, and reign now as our Prince of Peace. Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel. Shall come again with us to dwell.*

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

Prayer:

**O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Savior:  
Come and save us, O Lord our God.**