

## The O Antiphons Lead Us to Christmas

Every year since at least the 8<sup>th</sup> Century, beginning in the Third Week of Advent, the Church celebrates the O Antiphons. We may find ourselves thinking, “O no, what *are* antiphons?” or “O wow, why would the church celebrate *them*?” or “Omygoodness, why does that O make me feel intrigued?”

Antiphons in Catholic liturgy are short sentences sung or recited as part of prayer. For example, every Mass has an Entrance and Communion Antiphon. In the absence of a sung hymn, the congregation may recite the antiphon. If we have the opportunity to attend Mass during the week, these antiphons are familiar.

Another place to find antiphons are in the Divine Office or Liturgy of the Hours, which is a way to pray with the psalms and Scripture all through the day. The Office of the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship says, “In this way the Church fulfills the Lord’s precept to pray without ceasing, at once offering its praise to God the Father and interceding for the salvation of the world.”

The O Antiphons are the short sentences that go with the beautiful Magnificat canticle, which is Our Blessed Mother’s song of praise to God from Luke’s Gospel, during Evening Prayer or Vespers from December 17 through the 23. Each one highlights a title for the Messiah from the book of Isaiah, which begin with “O”: O Wisdom, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, etc. Each day during this week, a way to think about Jesus in terms of an image from the Old Testament’s messianic prophecies is revealed. The prayers and images have a way of taking hold of our imagination. The use of the imperative “come,” repeatedly, expresses the deep longing for a Messiah to redeem us and bring us everlasting life.

This Advent, when we are singing the hymn, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” let’s listen for the titles of Jesus that are found in the verses and know we are echoing the centuries-old O Antiphons. O Yes!

O Antiphon translations from *Catholic Household Blessings and Prayers*.

December 17	O Wisdom	O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love: come to teach us the path of knowledge!
December 18	O Adonai (Lord)	O Adonai and Leader of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai: come to rescue us with your mighty power!
December 19	O Root of Jesse	O Root of Jesse's stem, sign of God's love for all his people: come to save us without delay!
December 20	O Key of David	O Key of David, opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom: come and free the prisoners of darkness!
December 21	O Radiant Dawn	O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.
December 22	O King of Nations	O King of all nations and keystone of the Church: come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!
December 23	O Emmanuel	O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law: come to save us, Lord our God!