

Worship Service

BY ROBERT B. KRUSCHWITZ

With striking biblical images of creation, redemption, and ultimate restoration, the seven “Great Antiphons” or “O Antiphons” remind us that Christ, whose glorious return we anticipate and patiently await during Advent, is surrounding and sustaining us already.

These ancient prayers address God in Christ with messianic titles drawn from Israel’s prophetic writings. In seven distinct, but interrelated ways they voice the ultimate petition of Scripture – “Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20). Collectively they also suggest Christ’s response to that plea: the seven titles in Latin – SAPIENTIA, ADONAI, RADIX JESSE, CLAVIS DAVID, ORIENS, REX GENTIUM, and EMMANUEL – in reverse order form an acrostic ERO CRAS which means “I am coming soon.”

O HIGHEST WISDOM, COME

Call to Worship: Amos 5:8

Seek him who made the Pleiades and Orion,
and turns deep darkness into the morning,
and darkens the day into night,
who calls for the waters of the sea,
and pours them out on the surface of the earth,
the LORD is his name.

Chiming of the Hour

The First Antiphon¹

O Highest Wisdom, come.
While reaching end to end
in sweetness ord’ring all,
to us, O mighty Savior,
discerning judgment, teach.

Silent Meditation

Advent is the “sacrament” of the presence of God in the world, in the mystery of Christ at work in history.... This mystery is the revelation of God in the Incarnate Son. But it is not merely a manifestation of the divine perfections, it is the concrete plan of God for the salvation of humanity and the restoration of the whole world in Christ.

This plan is envisaged not as a future prospect but as a present fact. The “last things” are already present and realized in a hidden manner. The Kingdom of God is thus already “in the midst of us.”

Thomas Merton (1915-1968)²

O LORD OF ISRAEL, COME
O ROOT OF JESSE, COME

The Second and Third Antiphons

O Lord of Israel, come.
Through bushes breathing fire,
to Moses you gave Law;
O come, redeeming Ruler,
with arms outstretched to save.

O Root of Jesse, come.
This ensign raised for all
to whom the nations pray,
before whom kings keep silent:
to rescue quickly come.

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 11:1-5, 11

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;

but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
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 around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples;
the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.

Hymn of Praise

“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”

Come, thou long expected Jesus
born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us,
let us find our rest in thee.
Israel’s strength and consolation,
hope of all the earth thou art;
dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,
born a child and yet a king,
born to reign in us forever,
now thy gracious kingdom bring.
By thine own eternal Spirit
rule in all our hearts alone;
By thine all sufficient merit,
raise us to thy glorious throne.

Charles Wesley (1745)

Tune: HYFRYDOL

O KEY OF DAVID, COME

The Fourth Antiphon

O Key of David, come.
Unlock what none shall bind,
and lock what none shall loose:
the captives in the darkness
imprisoned, now set free.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 16:13-19

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The Word of the Lord for God's people.

Thanks be to God.

Litany of Confession

Almighty and most merciful God,
we come before you with broken hearts to confess our sin.
"The captives in the darkness" – that would be us.

We have sinned against you by ignoring your life-giving laws,
leaving undone things we should have done,
and doing things we ought not to have done.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy.

We have betrayed our neighbors whom you so dearly love,
leaving undone things we should have done,
and doing things we ought not to have done.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy.

We have slighted the physical world that you ordered in love,
leaving undone things we should have done,
and doing things we ought not to have done.

Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy.

For these sins against you, one another, and the world, we repent.
(silent prayers of confession)

Unlock our wayward hearts with your love
and illumine our darkened minds with understanding of your way,
so that our actions may be pleasing to you.

May your peace, which surpasses all understanding,
guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
through your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: Revelation 3:7b, 11-12

“These are the words of the holy one, the true one,
who has the key of David,
who opens and no one will shut,
who shuts and no one opens:

“I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.”

O GLORIOUS DAYSPRING, COME

The Fifth Antiphon

O glorious Dayspring, come.
The bright eternal light
and sun of righteousness,
on those who sit in darkness
and death’s cruel shadow, shine.

Children’s Sermon

Do you like to sing? When do you do it—when you are happy, or when you are sad? Sometimes a song cheers us up and gives us hope when we are sad.

Long ago at the beginning of the Civil War, which was the very saddest time for our nation, Robert Lowry sang his most beautiful song, “How Can I Keep from Singing?” Why could Mr. Lowry sing when he and everyone else around him had so many reasons to be sad? “My life flows on in endless song,” he sang, for “above earth’s lamentation / I hear the sweet though far off hymn / that hails a new creation.” The “far off hymn” Lowry heard reminded him that despite all of the sadness around him (that’s what “lamentation” means—an expression of sadness), Jesus Christ is alive and loves him and the world. Lowry could not help but join in that song: “Since Christ is Lord of Heav’n and earth, / how can I keep from singing?”

Today we are singing seven wonderful songs, the “O Antiphons,” that remind us Jesus Christ is alive, and he loves us and the world. Like the “far off hymn” Mr. Lowry heard, these songs make us want to sing along—even if we are sad, because they give us hope.

We are also reading two beautiful, hopeful songs from the Bible. At the close of the service, _____ will read a song by Jesus' mother Mary. Listen for it! But right now, _____ will read a song by Zechariah, who was John the Baptist's father. In this song Zechariah thanks God for his son, John, and for the coming savior, Jesus Christ.

The Benedictus / Song of Zechariah: Luke 1:68-79

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,
for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.
He has raised up a mighty savior for us
in the house of his servant David,
as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,
that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all
who hate us.
Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,
and has remembered his holy covenant,
the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,
to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies,
might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness
before him all our days.
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.
By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to guide our feet into the way of peace.

O KING OF NATIONS, COME

The Sixth Antiphon

O King of Nations, come.
The hope and cornerstone
who makes from many, one,
you fashioned us in Eden—
your earthen vessels, save.

Epistle Reading: Ephesians 2:17-22

So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

*Sermon**Hymn of Response*

“All Praise to Our Redeeming Lord” (vv. 1 and 2)

All praise to our redeeming Lord,
who joins us by his grace;
and bids us, each to each restored,
together seek his face.

He bids us build each other up;
and, gathered into one,
to our high calling’s glorious hope,
we hand in hand go on.

Charles Wesley (1747)

Suggested Tunes: ST. PETER (Reinagle) or NEW BRITAIN

*Offering**Passing the Peace of Christ*

O GOD AMONG US, COME

The Seventh Antiphon

O God among Us, come.
Great king, who gives the Law
to gather nations nigh,
O Lord our God, Redeemer,
to save your children, come.

The Magnificat / Song of Mary: Luke 1:46-55

My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.

Silent Reflection

The Seventh Antiphon

Benediction: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this. Amen.

NOTES

1 The author's metrical translations of the O Antiphons in this worship service are copyright © 2010 The Center for Christian Ethics at Baylor University in Waco, TX. Kurt Kaiser's melody and accompaniment for these texts are on pp. 64-65 of this issue.

2 Adapted from Thomas Merton, *Seasons of Celebration: Meditations on the Cycle of Liturgical Feasts* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2009; Trappist, KY: The Abbey of Gethsemani, 1950), 51, 53.