

These seven prayers—the Great Antiphons, or O Antiphons—are among the richest treasures of Advent. With a montage of haunting biblical images of creation, redemption, and ultimate restoration they remind us that Christ, whose glorious return we anticipate and patiently await during Advent, is surrounding and sustaining us already. He is truly Emmanuel, “God among us,” for he is at once the wisdom who creates and orders the universe, the lawgiver who establishes righteousness through Israel and the Church, the redeemer who has overcome death and rescued his creation from sin, and the great king who is drawing his children from every nation and restoring them in love.

These ancient prayers—collected in Rome by the eighth century, though some of the component prayers may be centuries older—are simple in form: after addressing God in Christ with a striking Messianic title drawn from Israel’s prophetic writings, each one describes a gracious act of God and offers a petition apropos to its description of Christ. In seven various, 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.”

This beautiful call and response structure of the O Antiphons is unfortunately lost in English translation. No translation captures the acrostic reply, of course, and most metrical translations fail to reproduce the tripartite structure of the prayers. We have tried to render singable texts with a melody and accompaniment that highlight the original form of these petitions.

Traditionally during the final Advent vesper services on December 17 through 23, one of these antiphons is said or chanted before and after the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)—allowing each antiphon to cast its distinctive light on Mary’s rejoicing over the gracious acts of God to Israel that are being fulfilled through her. We present them in a similar way—as framing devices for a period of Scripture reading and reflection—in the short prayer services that follow. Alternatively, these antiphons may be sung separately or together as a hymn during Advent worship services, or used to create in a single service of Advent music and lessons. We provide an example of the latter worship service, as well as a simplified version of the antiphons (with melody and verses only), online at www.ChristianEthics.ws.

O HIGHEST WISDOM, COME

Call to Prayer: 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.

First Antiphon

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

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 11:2-3a

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.

Epistle Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Gospel Reading: John 1:1-5

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came

into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Silent Reflection

First Antiphon

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
fill our hearts with your love
and our minds with your wisdom
so that our actions will be pleasing to you.

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

O LORD OF ISRAEL, COME

Call to Prayer: Psalm 119:55

I remember your name in the night, O LORD,
and keep your law.

Second Antiphon

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

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 11:3b-5

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.

Epistle Reading: Galatians 6:1-5

My friends, if anyone is detected in a transgression, you who have received the Spirit should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness. Take care that you yourselves are not tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. For if those who are nothing think they are something, they deceive themselves. All must test their own work; then that work, rather than their neighbor's work, will become a cause for pride. For all must carry their own loads.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 7:24-29

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell – and great was its fall!"

Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Silent Reflection

Second Antiphon

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
fill our hearts with zeal
and our minds with saving knowledge of your way
so that our actions will be pleasing to you.

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

O ROOT OF JESSE, COME

Call to Prayer: Psalm 54:2

Hear my prayer, O God;
give ear to the words of my mouth.

Third Antiphon

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, 10

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
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.

Epistle Reading: Romans 15:7-9, 12

Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you,
for the glory of God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of
the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might con-
firm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles
might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will confess you among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to your name”;

and again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse shall come,
the one who rises to rule the Gentiles;
in him the Gentiles shall hope.”

Gospel Reading: Luke 1:26-33

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in
Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was
Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he
came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”

But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Silent Reflection

Third Antiphon

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
fill our hearts with love for all nations
and our minds with understanding to serve them
so that our actions will be pleasing to you.

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

O KEY OF DAVID, COME

Call to Prayer: Psalm 42:8

By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

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.

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 9:6-7

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually,
and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Epistle Reading: Revelation 3:7, 11-12

“And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:
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.”

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.”

Silent Reflection

*Fourth Antiphon**The Lord's Prayer**Concluding Prayer*

Lord God,
fill our hearts with love for one another
and our minds with wise counsel
so that our actions will be pleasing to you.

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

O GLORIOUS DAYSPRING, COME

Call to Prayer: Psalm 139:11-12

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.

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.

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 9:1-2

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time the LORD brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness
have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness –
on them light has shined.

Epistle Reading: Revelation 22:16

“It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

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.

*Silent Reflection**Fifth Antiphon**The Lord's Prayer**Concluding Prayer*

Lord God,
fill our hearts with mercy
and our minds with discernment
so that our actions will be pleasing to you.

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

O KING OF NATIONS, COME

Call to Prayer: Psalm 65:1-2

Praise is due to you,
O God, in Zion;
and to you shall vows be performed,
O you who answer prayer!
To you all flesh shall come.

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.

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 28:16-17

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD,
See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone,
a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation:
“One who trusts will not panic.”

And I will make justice the line,
and righteousness the plummet;
hail will sweep away the refuge of lies,
and waters will overwhelm the shelter of falsehood.

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.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 21:33-42

“Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally he sent his son to them, saying, ‘They will respect my son.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.’ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?” They said to him, “He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time.”

Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures:

‘The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
this was the Lord’s doing,
and it is amazing in our eyes’”?

*Silent Reflection**Sixth Antiphon**The Lord’s Prayer**Concluding Prayer*

Lord God,
fill our hearts with hope
and our minds with welcome for your restoring grace
so that our actions will be pleasing to you.

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

O GOD AMONG US, COME

Call to Prayer: Psalm 141:2

Let my prayer be counted as incense before you,
and the lifting up of my hands as an evening sacrifice.

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.

Old Testament Reading: Isaiah 7:14

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 1:20b-23

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins." All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

"Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son,
and they shall name him Emmanuel,"

which means, "God is with us."

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

Seventh Antiphon

The Lord's Prayer

Concluding Prayer

Lord God,
fill our hearts with joy
and our minds with perception of your presence
so that our actions will be pleasing to you.

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