

O Antiphons by Jennifer Gregory Miller

The last seven days before Christmas (starting December 17) marks the beginning of the "**O**" *Antiphons*, the seven jewels of our liturgy. Each evening in Vespers the antiphon is sung or recited at the Magnificat. Dating back to the fourth century, these antiphons address Christ with seven magnificent Messianic titles, based on the Old Testament prophecies and types of Christ. They sum up in excellence the longing of the Redeemer, and we join the antiphons and echo the prayer "Come!" They are entitled "O" because each begins with an "O".

I'm very fond of this time of Advent. This is a little "pick-me-up" that helps us refocus. Our Advent endeavors and focus haven't always come to fruition. The O Antiphons reminds me that Christ comes in 7 days, and although the outward preparations can cause a frenzy, the O Antiphons beckon me to relax and invite Christ to come into my heart. The urgent "Come!" reminds me of a child's eager and impatient waiting for Christmas Eve.

The antiphons themselves are not always easy to relate to children. There are many different craft ideas to mark these days. No matter how they are presented, my intention is to unite our family's prayers with the whole Church. The antiphons can be found in the Vespers, and also the Alleluia verse at Mass. The "O" Antiphons are the verses for the ancient hymn *O Come, O Come Emmanuel*. The first letter of the Messianic titles: Emmanuel, Rex, Oriens, Clavis, Radix, Adonai, Sapientia—spell out Latin words ERO CRAS, meaning, "Tomorrow, I will come." (The translations below are the traditional antiphons; they do not match exactly with the current Divine Office or Alleluia verse.)

Keeping this in mind, we are adding to our prayers the Antiphon of the day, the Magnificat, and singing the corresponding verse of the *O Come Emmanuel*.

Adding elements to our meals is another aspect of incorporating the O Antiphons. One way is reviving the old custom of monasteries of different monks furnishing extra treats on these days to the members of the community. As Florence Berger describes:

The gardener gave the community some of his finest dried or preserved fruits on Dec 19 when he called on Christ: 'O Root of Jesse, come to deliver us and tarry not.' The cellarer unlocked the best wine for his treat as he called: 'O Key of David, come, and come quickly.' Finally, on Dec 23, the abbot gave his extra gift to the brothers. Expense accounts which are still extant show how generous and extensive a list of foods were used on the abbot's 'O day.'" — *Cooking for Christ*

Our family did this as I was growing up, and it was one of my favorite Advent memories, especially having all the family members involved in a surprise. Depending on the size of your family, each day can be "assigned" to a family member, usually youngest to oldest, so that they can provide a special treat for that *O Antiphon* day. The surprise usually revolves around dinner, but it does not need to be too fancy or a food treat. The best part is leaving it up to the member to keep it a secret until dinner time, except possibly with some help from Mom and Dad. I'm also incorporating different ways to incorporate the symbols of the antiphons in our meals or dessert.

If we try to make our own the thought of these antiphons on their proper days, letting their ardent aspirations dominate our prayer life, our minds and hearts will surely be more closely attuned to the mind and heart of the Church as she prepares for the coming of her King. (*With Christ Through the Year*, Rev. Bernard Strasser, O.S.B., 1947).

Gospel Cantic: Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55)

Antiphon of the Day

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
 my spirit rejoices in God my Savior
 for He has looked with favor on His lowly servant.

From this day all generations will call me blessed:
 the Almighty has done great things for me,
 and Holy is His Name.

He has mercy on those who fear Him
 in every generation.

He has shown the strength of His arm,
 He has scattered the proud in their conceit.

He has cast down the mighty from their thrones,
 and has lifted up the lowly.

He has filled the hungry with good things,
 and the rich He has sent away empty.

He has come to the help of His servant Israel
 for He has remembered His promise of mercy,
 the promise He made to our fathers,
 to Abraham and His children for ever.

Repeat Antiphon

Veni, Veni Emmanuel (O Come, O Come Emmanuel)

<p>1. O Come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear. Refrain: Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.</p>	<p>December 20: O Key of David 5. O come, thou Key of David, come, And open wide our heavenly home; Make safe the way that leads on high, And close the path to misery. Refrain</p>
<p>December 17: O Wisdom 2. O come, O Wisdom from on high, who orders all things mightily, to us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her ways to go. Refrain</p>	<p>December 21: O Dayspring 6. O come, Thou Dayspring from on high, And cheer us by thy drawing nigh; Disperse the gloomy clouds of night. And death's dark shadow put to flight. Refrain</p>
<p>December 18: O Lord and Ruler 3. O come, O come, thou Lord of might, Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height In ancient times didst give the law In cloud and majesty, and awe. Refrain</p>	<p>December 22: O King of Nations 7. O come, Desire of nations, bind, In one the hearts of all mankind; Bid Thou our sad divisions cease, And be Thyself our King of peace. Refrain</p>
<p>December 19: O Root of Jesse 4. O come, Thou Rod of Jesse's stem, From ev'ry foe deliver them That trust Thy mighty power to save, And give them vict'ry o'er the grave. Refrain</p>	<p>December 23: O Emmanuel 8. O Come, O come, Emmanuel, And ransom captive Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here Until the Son of God appear. Refrain</p>

December 17: O Wisdom / O Sapientia



Antiphon: O Wisdom, You came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and reaching from beginning to end You ordered all things mightily and sweetly. * **Come** and teach us the way of prudence.

Latin Antiphon: O Sapientia, quae ex ore Altissimi prodidisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem, fortiter suaviter disponensque omnia: * **Veni** ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

Magnificat (See Page 2)
Repeat Antiphon

Verse from O Come Emmanuel:

O come, O Wisdom from on high,
who orders all things mightily,
to us the path of knowledge show,
and teach us in her ways to go.

Refrain: Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Symbols: Oil lamp; open book or scroll; dove (Holy Spirit); all-seeing eye.

Suggested Foods: Incorporate foods that are known to be "brain food". This list includes blueberries and tomatoes, dark chocolate and avocados and especially eggs; chicken wings to remind us of the Holy Spirit; dip bread into olive oil.



Alabaster Holy Spirit Window in St. Peter's Basilica, Vatican

December 18: O Lord and Ruler / O Adonai



Moses with the Ten Commandments, 1648, Philippe de Champaigne



Antiphon: O Lord and Ruler the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the flame of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: * **Come**, and redeem us with outstretched arms.

Latin Antiphon: O Adonai, et Dux domus Israel, qui Moysi in igne flammae rubi apparuisti, et ei in Sina legem dedisti: * **Veni** ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.

Magnificat (See Page 2) Repeat Antiphon

Verse from O Come Emmanuel:

O come, O come, thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty, and awe.

Refrain: Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Symbols: Burning bush; stone tablets; tent/tabernacle in desert.

Suggested Foods: The symbol of the burning bush evokes hot, spicy, or flaming foods. Try grilled or flame-broiled, flambé foods, or hot and spicy food. A simple treat would be tortilla chips and salsa; red hot candies.

December 19: O Root of Jesse / O Radix Jesse



The Tree of Jesse, English Miniature Illuminated Manuscript 1140s



Antiphon: O Root of Jesse, that stands for an ensign of the people, before whom the kings keep silence and unto whom the Gentiles shall make supplication: * **Come**, to deliver us, and tarry not.

Latin Antiphon: O Radix Jesse, qui stas in signum populorum, super quem continebunt reges os suum, quem gentes deprecabuntur: * **Veni** ad liberandum nos, iam noli tardare.

Magnificat (See Page 2) Repeat Antiphon

Verse from O Come Emmanuel:

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse's stem,
From ev'ry foe deliver them
That trust Thy mighty power to save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

Refrain: Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Symbols: flower; plant with flower with roots; root with flowering stem; stump with roots.

Suggested Foods: Root vegetables, such as carrots, potatoes, sweet potatoes or yams. Carrot and raisin salad; twice-baked potatoes; different edible flowers (broccoli) or foods shaped like flowers (fruit cut in fancy ways).

December 20: O Key of David / O Clavis David



King David, by Andre Beauneveu, before 1402



Antiphon: O Key of David, and scepter of the house of Israel, who opens and no man shuts, who shuts and no man opens: * **Come**, and bring forth the captive from his prison, he who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Latin Antiphon: O clavis David, et sceptrum domus Israel: qui aperis, et nemo claudit; claudis, et nemo aperit: * **Veni**, et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris.

Magnificat (See Page 2) Repeat Antiphon

Verse from O Come Emmanuel:

O come, thou Key of David, come,
And open wide our heavenly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high,
And close the path to misery.

Refrain: Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Symbols: Key; broken chains.

Suggested Foods: Serve a bowl of unshelled nuts with a nutcracker. Without the "key" (nutcracker) you cannot get inside easily. Breaking the nut can be a reminder of the broken chains. Other ideas: Key lime foods or drink; unshelled pistachios; shell fish.

December 21: O Dayspring / O Oriens



Antiphon: O Dawn of the East, brightness of light eternal, and sun of justice: * **Come**, and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Latin Antiphon: O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol iustitiae: * **Veni**, et illumina sedentes in tenebris et umbra mortis.

Magnificat (See Page 2) Repeat Antiphon

Verse from O Come Emmanuel:

O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadow put to flight.

Refrain: Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Symbols: Sunrise; sun.

Suggested Foods: Citrus fruits served in various fashion, in season and reminders of the sun.



Sunrise in a Wood, after 1670, Jacob Isaackszoon van Ruisdael

December 22: O King of the Nations / O Rex Gentium



Antiphon: **O King of the Gentiles** and their desired One, the cornerstone that makes both one: * **Come**, and deliver man, whom you formed out of the dust of the earth.

Latin Antiphon: **O Rex gentium**, et desideratus earum, lapisque angularis, qui facis utraque unum: * **Veni**, et salva hominem, quem de limo formasti.

Magnificat (See Page 2) Repeat Antiphon

Verse from *O Come Emmanuel*:

O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night.
And death's dark shadow put to flight.

Refrain: Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Symbols: Crown; crown and scepter; cornerstone.

Suggested Foods: Crown cake; wreath cookie; Rice Krispie treats shaped into wreath or cornerstones; simple butter cookies in ring shapes; Cornerstone ideas could include loaf shaped breads, such as pound cake, quick breads like cranberry-nut, banana nut.



The Adoration of the Magi, Jean Bourdichon

December 23: O Emmanuel / O Emmanuel



Nativity, at Night, 1484-90, Geertgen tot Sint Jans



Antiphon: **O Emmanuel**, God with us, our King and lawgiver, the expected of the nations and their Savior: * **Come** to save us, O Lord our God.

Latin Antiphon: **O Emmanuel**, Rex et legifer noster, expectatio gentium, et Salvator earum: * **Veni** ad salvandum nos Domine Deus noster.

Magnificat (See Page 2) Repeat Antiphon

Verse from O Come Emmanuel:

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

Refrain: Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

Symbols: Manger; Chalice and host; Crown with tablets.

Suggested Foods: Considering the symbols, bread and wine would be a simple addition for the meal. Even though the people of the Old Testament didn't realize that Emmanuel was to come in the form of a baby, we do know that Jesus became man, first as a helpless infant. Think of soft "mushy" foods to serve: mashed potatoes, ice cream, pudding, rice pudding, or applesauce.