

THE O ANTIPHONS

Introduction

We are entering today the Great Seven Days before Christmas – a bit like Holy Week in Lent. We call them the days of the ‘O’ Antiphons. You have just heard one of them sung.

In each of the seven days the Gospel acclamation is an antiphon beginning with the word ‘O’ showing we are calling someone. These antiphons are also used at Vespers in the Divine Office so are repeated 3 times a day.

Each day we are calling out to the child in Mary’s womb, using a title usually taken from the Old Testament looking forward to the coming of the Messiah. Occasionally it is from the Apocalypse, Revelation, which looks forward to the Second Coming of Christ.

When we look at or hear the Big ‘O’ we can think of Mary who is big and round in the last stages of her *pregnancy* – bring Christ into our world.

The O also represents *the circle of our lives* – we come from God and we return to God. We can also think of God coming to us and we going to God

O WISDOM 17th December

So today we call on Jesus as the Wisdom of God.

‘O Wisdom, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High’ – that is who He is.
‘You fill the Universe and hold all things together in a strong but gentle manner’ that is what He does

‘O come to teach us the Way of Truth’ - that is what we want for Christmas.

Wisdom is the gift that King Solomon asked for. It is what we need so that we can live our lives as God wants us to. The whole world is held together by the wisdom of God – things get upset because, unlike Solomon, we do not ask for it or we do not listen. And so we pray today to the child in Mary’s womb: **Come and teach us the way of Truth**

Wisdom 9:1-4 Colossians 1:9-11

O ADONAI 18th December

Today’s O Antiphon is

O Adonai, lawgiver and leader of the house of Israel
You appeared to Moses in the burning bush and you gave him the law on Sinai
Come and save us with your mighty power

The Hebrew word ‘Adonai’ means ‘Lord’. This word was used by the Jews out of respect rather than the holy name of God, Yahweh.

Jesus who is coming to us *is the Lord* – the God who revealed himself to Moses in the burning bush. This event led to the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and to the giving of the ten commandments.

Jesus comes *to save us from our slavery to sin* – from all that keeps us from God. The law he brings is a law of justice for all of creation and especially for the poor and oppressed. It is the law of Love.

We **honour** Jesus who is coming as our *Lord and lawgiver*

We **ask him** to save us – to free us from all that breaks our relationship with God, and with other people and with the universe.

O Adonai – leader of the house of Israel
You appeared to Moses in the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai
Come and save us with your mighty power

Exodus 3:1-6 19:16-20:21 Acts 2:36 Philippians 2:9-11 Luke 4:18

O STOCK OF JESSE 19th December

O Stock of Jesse,
You stand as a sign for all the nations,
kings fall silent before you whom the peoples acclaim
Come to deliver us and do not delay

Christmas is a family time. The children and grandchildren are especially important to us at this time. So are the parents and grandparents.
Mary is carrying Jesus in her womb. Jesse, father of King David, is his ancestor. Jesus is of Jesse's stock

The scripture background to this antiphon is from Isaiah chapter 11

*There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of its roots
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.*

Isaiah also said:

*Like a sapling he grew up before us, like a root in dry ground
Yet he was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*

The tree became the tree of the cross which is the sign for all the nations.

Jesus continues the metaphor:

*I am the true vine, you are the branches
I, when I am lifted up will draw all peoples to myself.*

The bare branches of our winter trees remind us of how much we need Jesus to come and deliver us NOW – and give us new life.

O Jesus, you are the Stock of Jesse,
You stand as a sign for all the nations,
kings fall silent before you whom the peoples acclaim
Come to deliver us and do not delay

Matthew 1:1-16 Isaiah 11:1-4 53:1-3 John 15:5 12:32

O KEY OF DAVID 20th December

O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel,
What you open no-one can close
What you close no-one can open
Come to lead the captive from prison
Free those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

We call on Jesus today as our key to the kingdom of God. Because of him there are no locked doors between God and us. God gives us free access to himself and God asks us to open ourselves to Him.

Jesus is being born as a human person like us -he shows us how to live in God's way. So we also are meant to be keys – keys to open doors for other people. How? We free people when we affirm them, calm their fears, when we are with them in their anxieties and put up with their quirks – we free people when we love them as we love ourselves.

As Paul says: God through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation...so we are ambassadors of Christ'

O Key of David..
Come to lead the captive from prison...
Free those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death

Isaiah 22:22-23 Ephesians 2:13,18-19 Revelation 3:7-8

O RISING SUN 21st December

O Rising Sun,
You are the splendour of eternal light and sun of justice
Come and give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death

Today is the winter solstice – 21st December – the darkest day of the year. For the pagans it was the day for the Celebration of the Unconquered Sun. They believed that the Sun would come again.

Instinctively we look for light. Today we call on Jesus, the light of the world who is to be born again in us this Christmas and give us hope. St John says: “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it”

We know something of the darkness of our times – in the world, in our country, in this neighbourhood, in our families.

We call on Jesus as Sun of Justice – to take our needs in hand because we trust him. We call on him to help us to be just and good people who bring light to others

O Rising Sun, eternal light and Sun of Justice
Come and give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

John 1: 1-9 Isaiah 9:1-3; 60:19-20 Psalm 72 Mark 16:2

O KING OF PEOPLES 22nd December

O King of Peoples, whom all the people desire
You are the cornerstone which makes all one
O come and save us whom you made from clay

Today we describe Jesus as ‘the cornerstone’. When you think of a building the cornerstone is the one that integrates two walls running in different directions.

The peoples of the earth are divided in so many ways. We have just seen that the nations cannot not agree on climate change. Then think of the people you do not get along well with, even within this neighbourhood or at work.

Jesus the cornerstone reconciles difference while respecting our infinite variety. He is the one who can make us into a new building, using all our different ideas and talents

Today in the name of all peoples we call on Jesus, Prince of Peace to heal our divisions.

O King of Peoples,
You are the cornerstone which makes all one
Come and save us whom you made from clay.

Ephesians 2:14-22 1Peter 2:4-10 (Isaiah 8:16 Psalm 118:22) Isaiah 2:2-4

O EMMANUEL 23rd December

O Emmanuel, you are our King and Judge
The one whom peoples await and their Saviour
O come and save us Lord, our God.

'He shall be called Emmanuel – God with us'. That is what Joseph was told by the angel. So we call him by that name in the last of the O antiphons – God with us. His presence is not just fact of history but a fact of today. His presence *is* salvation for us, now. He is always with us yet He is always coming to give us a new beginning
That is what Christmas reminds us of

After today there will be no more O antiphons. The Vigil of Christmas will arrive and we will no longer cry 'O' but say with confidence:
Today we know that the Lord will come and tomorrow you will see his glory

St Leo the Great said in his Christmas sermon:
'O Christian be aware of your nobility – it is God's own nature that you share'
And so we pray that God's salvation will be worked in us

O Emmanuel
The one whom peoples await and their Saviour
Come and save us Lord, our God.

Matthew 1:20-24 (Isaiah 7:14) Revelation 21:3