



The "O" Antiphons of Advent

17 December



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.

This antiphon, like all the others to follow, is based on a composite of Scripture texts.

Sirach 24:3: "From the mouth of the Most High I came forth, and like mist covered the earth".

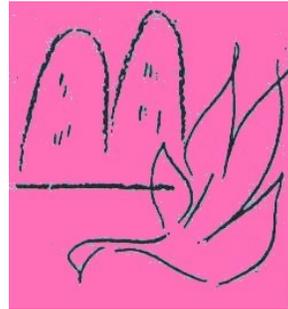
Wisdom 8:1: "She reaches from end to end mightily and governs all things well".

Wisdom is here personified, present with God at the beginning of creation. This is a prefigurement of Jesus, the eternal Word of God, the "logos" John described in the opening of his gospel. Wisdom is the foundation of fear of the Lord, of holiness, or right living: it is wisdom whom we bid to come and teach us prudence. The cry "Come" will be repeated again and again, insistent and hope-filled.



The "O" Antiphons of Advent

18 December



O Adonai and Ruler of the House of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and on Mount Sinai gave him your law. Come, and with outstretched arm redeem us.

Exodus 3:2: "An angel of the Lord appeared to him in fire flaming out of a bush. As he looked on, he was surprised to see that the bush, though on fire, was not consumed".

Exodus 6:6: "Therefore say to the Israelites: I am Yahweh. I will free you from the enforced labor of the Egyptians and will deliver you from their slavery. I will rescue you by my outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment".

"Adonai" is Hebrew for "my Lord", and was substituted by devout Jews for the name "Yahweh", out of reverence. With this second antiphon we progress from creation to the familiar story of God manifesting himself by name to Moses and giving his law to Israel as their way of life. We are also reminded of the Israelites' deliverance from bondage under pharaoh - a foreshadowing of our own redemption from sin. The image of God's arm outstretched in power to save his chosen people also brings to mind the later scene of Jesus with his arms outstretched for us on the cross.



The "O" Antiphons of Advent

19 December



O Root of Jesse,

you stand as a sign for the peoples; before you kings shall keep silence and to you all nations shall have recourse. Come, save us, and do not delay.

Isaiah 52:13, 15; 53:2: "See, my servant shall prosper... So shall he startle many nations, because of him kings shall stand speechless. ...He grew up like a sapling before him, like a shoot".

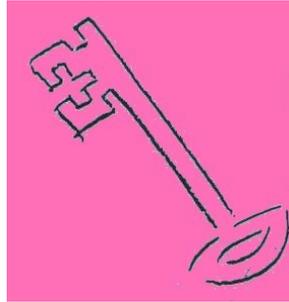
Isaiah prophesied a restoration of David's throne - a new branch budding out of the old root. Christ is the root of Jesse in a two-fold sense: he is the descendant of David, who was the youngest son of Jesse, and he inherited the royal throne. The angel foretold to Mary, "The Lord God will give him the throne of David his father. He will rule over the house of Jacob forever and his reign will be without end" (Luke 1:32-33).

Our hearts more and more urgently cry out for God's reign to extend over all humanity: "Come, save us, and do not delay".



The "O" Antiphons of Advent

20 December



O Key of David

and Scepter of the House of Israel; you open and no man closes;
you close and no man opens. Come, and deliver from the chains of prison
those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Isaiah 22:22: "I will place the key of the House of David on his shoulder. When he opens,
no one shall shut; when he shuts, no one shall open.

Revelation 3:7: "To the presiding spirit of the church in Philadelphia write this: 'The holy
One, the true, who wields David's key, who opens and no one can close, who closes and
no one can open'".

Isaiah 42:6-7: "I formed you, and set you as a covenant of the people, a light for the
nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from confinement, and from
the dungeon those who live in darkness".

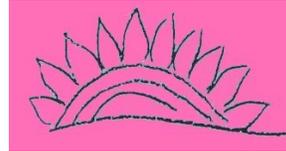
The key and scepter are traditional symbols of kingly power and authority. Christ, the
anointed one, is the heir of David and possessor of the kingdom. Jesus himself also made
use of this symbol, showing the prophetic relationship of the earthly kingdom of David to
the kingdom of God. All power and authority was given to him after the resurrection, and
he entrusted this power to "bind and to loose" to Peter and the ministers of his church.

In the closing petition we look to Jesus to unlock the fetters of sin that keep us tightly
chained. It is he who frees us from our captivity. We recall the deliverance proclaimed by
the psalmist of old: "they dwelt in darkness and gloom, bondsmen in want and in
chains,...and he led them forth from darkness and gloom and broke their bonds asunder"
(Psalm 107: 10, 14).



The "O" Antiphons of Advent

21 December



O Rising Dawn, Radiance of the Light eternal and Sun of Justice:
come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

Isaiah 9:1: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone".

Malachi 3:20: "For you who fear my name, there will arise the sun of justice with its healing rays".

2 Peter 1:19: "Keep your attention closely fixed on it, as you would on a lamp shining in a dark place, until the first streaks of dawn appear and the morning star rises in your heart".

This title is variously translated "morning star", "Dayspring", "rising sun", "radiant dawn", "orient". All beautifully express the idea of light shattering the darkness of night, of sin and death, of sickness and despair, with its brightness bringing healing and warmth to cold hearts. Jesus is indeed the true light, the radiance of his Father's splendor. The church prays this petition daily in the Benedictus, joining in the words of Zechariah: "He, the Dayspring, shall visit us in his mercy to shine on those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:78-79).



The "O" Antiphons of Advent

22 December



O King of the Gentiles and the Desired of all, you are the cornerstone that binds two into one. Come, and save man whom you fashioned out of clay.

Isaiah 28:16: "Therefore, thus says the Lord God: See, I am laying a stone in Zion, a stone that has been tested, a precious cornerstone as a sure foundation".

Ephesians 2:14: "He it is who is our peace, and who made the two of us one by breaking down the barrier of hostility that kept us apart".

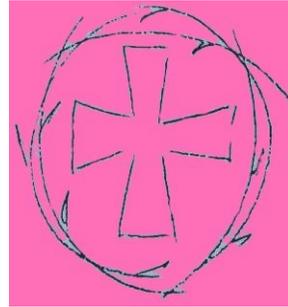
The earlier antiphons have already alluded to the Messiah coming not only to Israel but to convert the gentile nations and redeem them for his own. Now this sixth antiphon clearly addresses the savior as the king of the gentiles (Jer.10:7) and the Desired One of the nations. The Messiah is the cornerstone on whom our spiritual foundations are laid, but on whom unbelievers stumble (Matt. 21:42). This cornerstone unites and binds Jew and gentile into one, making peace between them.

The plea is that God save all humanity, all his creation that he formed from the dust of the earth (Gen.2:7). We yearn for him once again to breathe the breath of his new life into us.



The "O" Antiphons of Advent

23 December



O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Expected of the nations and their Savior.
Come and save us, O Lord our God.

Isaiah 7:14: "Therefore the Lord himself will give you this sign: the virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel".

Isaiah 33:22: "Indeed the Lord will be there with us, majestic. Yes, the Lord our judge, the Lord our lawgiver, the Lord our king, he it is who will save us".

With this last antiphon our expectation finds joy now in the certainty of fulfillment. We call Jesus by one of the most personal and intimate of his titles, Emmanuel, God-with-us. We recall that in his birth from the Virgin Mary God takes on our very flesh and human nature: God coming nearer to us than we could have ever imagined! Yet he is also to be exalted above us as our king, the lawgiver and judge, the one whom we honor and obey. And he is our savior, long-expected by all creation. The final cry rises from us urgent in our need for daily salvation and forgiveness of our sins, and confident that our God will not withhold himself from us.