

The O Antiphons:

During the last week of Advent, from the 17th to the 24th December, the Scriptures at Mass shift their focus on to how Jesus came to be born. We are also treated to the richly poetic Alleluia verses for these days known as the “O Antiphons”. Their imagery draws a lot from the writings of the Prophet Isaiah that we hear during Advent. It’s not clear where they first originated. Some Christian writers refer to them as early as the 6th Century. They were definitely part of the Liturgy in Rome from the 8th Century onwards. They are called the “O Antiphons” because, in the sung Latin text, each of them begins with a Biblical name for God’s longed for Saviour preceded by an “O” calling upon the Lord to save us. As well as the version we hear during the Alleluia at Mass, there is a longer version prayed in the Antiphon at the Magnificat at Evening Prayer.

In the last days before the beautiful feast of Christmas, perhaps a phrase from these ancient prayers might inspire your own personal prayer. We offer some simple ideas and examples with each text below.

[The numbering and order of these varies each year because of the Fourth Sunday or Advent. We hope you can enjoy them.]

17th December: O Sapientia!

Gospel Acclamation: Wisdom of the Most High, ordering all things with strength and gentleness, come and teach us the way of truth.

Magnificat Antiphon : O Wisdom, you come forth from the mouth of the Most High. You fill the universe and hold all things together in a strong yet gentle manner. O come teach us the way of truth.

A Reflection: Lord Jesus, help me to order these busy days leading up to

Christmas with both strength and great gentleness. Help me to treasure the beauty of your wisdom guiding my steps.

18th December: O Adonai!

Gospel Acclamation: Ruler of the House of Israel, who gave the law to Moses on Sinai, come and save us with outstretched arm.

Magnificat Antiphon: O Adonai and leader of Israel, you appeared to Moses in a burning bush and you gave him the Law on Sinai. O come and save us with your mighty power.

A Reflection: Lord of my life, you showed yourself to Moses in the desert wilderness as 'the One who is'. Remind me in the desert of my life, that you are always there, inviting me to live by your saving love.

19th December: O Radix Jesse!

Gospel Acclamation: Root of Jesse, set up as a sign to the peoples, come to save us, and delay no more.

Magnificat Antiphon: O stock of Jesse, you stand as a signal for the nations; kings fall silent before you whom the peoples acclaim.

O come and deliver us, and do not delay.

A Reflection: Lord, be deeply rooted in every aspect my entire life. Help me to take time to be silent before you so as to welcome the urgency with which your love wishes to embrace my whole being.

20th December: O Emmanuel!

Gospel Acclamation: Emmanuel, our king and lawgiver, come and save us, Lord our God.

Magnificat Antiphon: O Immanuel, you are our king and judge, the One whom the peoples await and their Saviour. O come and save us, Lord our God.

A Reflection: Lord Jesus, you are Emmanuel, God-with-us. You accompany me, leading me to the eternal safety of your love for which our souls are longing.

21st December: O Clavis David!

Gospel Acclamation: Key of David, who open the gates of the eternal kingdom, come to liberate from prison the captive who lives in darkness.

Magnificat Antiphon: O key of David and sceptre of Israel, what you open no one else can close again; what you close no one can open. O come and lead the captive from prison; free those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

A Reflection: Lord, your love comes to open up an eternal future for me and to free me from what imprisons me in darkness and dead ends.

22nd December: O Rex Gentium!

Gospel Acclamation: King of the peoples and cornerstone of the Church, come and save mankind whom you made from the dust of the earth.

Magnificat Antiphon: O King whom all the peoples desire, you are the cornerstone which makes all one. O come and save mankind whom you made from clay.

A Reflection: Lord, in our hearts lies a longing only you can fulfil. You are our king, yet you come to crown our lowliness with your compassion.

23rd December: O Oriens!

Gospel Acclamation: Morning star, radiance of eternal light, sun of justice, come and enlighten those who live in darkness and the shadow of death.

Magnificat Antiphon: O Rising Sun, you are the splendour of eternal

light and the sun of justice. O come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

A Reflection: As surely as the sun rises each morning, the radiance of your love, Lord, accompanies me, calling me out of darkness into your own wonderful light.

Fr Damian McNeice