

The Great “O” Antiphons

Beginning on December 17, at Vespers of each day, the Church Liturgy introduces what are called the “O” Antiphons. These are beautiful prayers sung in Choir by the monks in a very splendid and solemn manner and tone. These antiphons, which are scriptural texts a few lines long, are so many jewels of inspired poetry. Each prayer ends on the eager cry – “Come”! There is a climactic order in these antiphons. In the first, *O Sapientia (O Wisdom)*, we take a backward flight into the recesses of eternity to address Wisdom, the Word of God. In the Second, *O Adonai (O Lord of Lords)*, we have leaped from eternity to the time of Moses and the Law of Moses (about 1400 BC). In the third, *O Radix Jesse (O Root of Jesse)*, we have come to the time when God was preparing the line of David (about 1100 BC). In the fourth, *O Clavis David (O Key of David)*, we have come to the year 1000 BC (the beginning of the final Millennium before the birth of the Lord). In the fifth, *O Oriens (O Rising Dawn)*, we see that the line of David is elevated so that the people may look upon a rising star in the east, and hence in the sixth, *O Rex Gentium (O King of Nations)*, we know that He is King of all the world of man. This brings us to the evening before the Vigil of Christmas (December 23), and before coming to the town limits of Bethlehem, we salute Him with the last great “O” and we sing *O Emmanuel (O God with Us)*.

Each evening at Vespers time (around 5:00 PM), the family should gather around their home altar for the recitation of the Rosary. When the Rosary is finished, one of the great “O” Antiphons should be recited as a solemn prayer. Special emphasis should be placed on the words at the end when we cry out to God in our needs and expectations. These are prayers of the highest level, and should be prayed with great solemnity and seriousness.

Are not our own days filled with anxiety, worry, concern, and expectation? Many indeed are the reasons for concern, but we must never lose hope. We too cry out “*O Emmanuel!*” and in accordance to the strength of our faith shall we be heard.

December 17



Wisdom

O Wisdom who camest out of the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end ordering all things mightily and sweetly: come and teach us the way of prudence!

December 18



Adonai

O Adonai and Leader of the house of Israel, who didst appear to Moses in the flame of the burning bush, and didst give unto him the law on Sinai: come, and with an outstretched arm redeem us!

December 19



Root of Jesse

O Root of Jesse who standest for an ensign of the people, before whom kings shall keep silence, and unto whom the gentiles shall make their supplication: come to deliver us and tarry not!

December 20



Key of David

O Key of David and Scepter of the house of Israel, who openest and no man shutteth, who shuttest and no man openeth: come and bring forth from his prison-house the captive that sitteth in darkness and in the shadow of death.

December 21



Dawn

O Dawn of the East, brightness of the light eternal, and Sun of Justice, come and enlighten them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

December 22



King

O King of the Gentiles and the desired of them, Thou cornerstone that makest both one, come and deliver man, whom Thou didst form out of the dust of the earth.

December 23



Emmanuel

O Emmanuel our King and Lawgiver, the expected of the nations and their Savior, come to save us, O Lord our God.