

PRAYER PRACTICE: PRAYING THE O ANTIPHONS

By Janice MacLean

Story

Dating back to the 4th century the "O Antiphons" are a series of short prayers based on seven titles for the Coming One. They were chanted during Vespers (Evening Prayer) from December 17 through 23. There are other prayers for Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.

The Benedictine monks arranged these antiphons as an acrostic. Starting with the last title and taking the first letter of each Latin title - **E**mmanuel, **R**ex, **O**riens, **C**lavis, **R**adix, **A**donai, **S**apientia - the Latin words "ero cras" are formed, meaning, "Tomorrow, I will come."

As we pray the O Antiphons we join a much larger community gathered in convents and cathedrals, in living rooms and small groups, and like you, in front of computer screens.

I am deeply attracted to this ancient liturgical tradition of praying with the O Antiphons. I pray my way through most every year.

As much as I love the O Antiphons, the traditional titles and images are a struggle. Sometimes I find them difficult to hold, but I always come back to them. There is always something intriguing to be found in these Hebrew scripture titles whether they comfort or disturb. O for wonder and surprise, O for noticing God among us, O for hope and justice.

The One who was coming is still coming. Look. Listen. Pay attention. The Coming One is hidden in plain sight.

O Antiphons as Spiritual Practice

You may want to pray the Antiphons each evening. If you have time, you might also "doodle" images that rise in you as you as you pray. You may want to try chanting them. The easiest chant is simply to sound the words in one tone. Or you may want to write your own "O Antiphons" based on your favourite images for the Coming One.

Dec. 17

*O Wisdom,
O Holy Word of God,
You govern all creation with your strong, yet tender care.
Come, and show your people the way to salvation.*

Dec. 18

*O Adonai of ancient Israel,
who showed yourself to Moses in the burning bush,
who gave him the holy law on Sinai mountain:
Come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.*

Dec.19

O Root of Jesse.
You have been raised up as a sign for all peoples;
Kings stand silent in your presence;
the nations bow down in worship before you.
Come, let nothing keep you from coming to our aid.

Dec. 20

O Key of David,
O Royal Power of Israel
you open and none can shut; you shut and none can open:
Come, break down the prison walls of death
for those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death;
and lead your captive people into freedom.

Dec.21

O Radiant Dawn,
Splendor of eternal light,
Sun of justice:
Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death.

Dec.22

O King of all the nations,
the only joy of every human heart;
You are the Cornerstone, and you make all people one.
Come and save the creature you fashioned from the dust.

Dec. 23

O Emmanuel,
Our Ruler and Giver of the Law
Desire of the nations,
We await you, our savior.
Come and set us free.