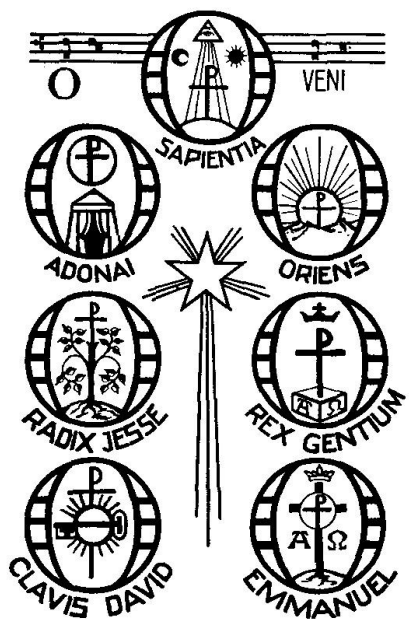




ENCOUNTER AN OLD TRADITION: THE *O ANTIPHONS*

The *O Antiphons* are verses recited at Vespers, one each evening, between December 17 and December 23. Each antiphon is based on a different title for Jesus taken from the Old Testament— titles like Emmanuel, Key of David, Dayspring, and Wisdom.

This year, when you sing, “O Come, O Come Emmanuel,” identify the different titles for Jesus and try to ponder what each one means. Know, too, that whenever you sing this

hymn, you are joining countless Christians over the centuries who have looked for Jesus’s coming.

The dominant theme of the *O Antiphons* is one of hoping and waiting for Jesus to come. Let’s trust that by contemplating these verses, our own anticipation will grow and be rewarded as we invite Jesus to come and be born in our hearts on Christmas.

There are three basic ways that the *O Antiphons* can help us to get ready for Christmas:

- First, the simple word “O” emphasizes the sense of desire, even awe, that surrounds these prayers. We are not simply asking Jesus for a favor, we are expressing a deep longing in our hearts.
- Second, because the *O Antiphons* highlight different titles for the Messiah, they help open our eyes to who Jesus is.
- Finally, each antiphon concludes with a plea for Jesus to do a powerful work in our lives when He does come.

PRAYING THE *O ANTIPHONS*

The *O Antiphons* are written in the form of a prayer, but they can just as easily become the basis for some activities that you and your family can do as you get ready for Christmas.

Beginning on December 17, establish a time when you will focus on the antiphon for each day. Maybe you can begin with the Lord’s Prayer or sing the verse from “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” that fits with that day’s antiphon. Read the antiphon for the day, followed by one or two of the related Scripture passages. Then have some fun with your family using the following activities.

WHAT IS ERO CRAS?

Whoever put the *O Antiphons* together clearly set out to have a little bit of fun. Working backward from December 23 to December 17, the first letter of each Latin title of Jesus spells out a sentence. Below are the Latin titles for Jesus with the English translation in parentheses.

E – Emmanuel (God is with us)

R – Rex (King)

O – Oriens (Radiant Dawn)

C – Clavis (Key of David)

R – Radix (Root of Jesse)

A – Adonai (Lord)

S – Sapientia (Wisdom)

In Latin, “**ero cras**” means “Tomorrow, I will come” – tomorrow being Christmas Eve.

If you pray the *O Antiphons* with your family during the last week of Advent, you’ll find your own heart joining in the chant: “Come, Lord Jesus!”

He’s almost here, and you have made yourself ready for Him. Merry Christmas!

December 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.*

(Isaiah 11:2-3; Wisdom 8:1; Proverbs 9:1)

Activity idea: Try to recall the best and worst decisions you ever made. While we all like the way our best decisions work out, we probably gain the most wisdom from our biggest mistakes. So, identify and explain how the Lord has given you wisdom through your decisions. Ask everyone to try to identify how God's grace has made them wiser as well.

Recipe idea: Serve a favorite fish dish, or some other brain-healthy food, for dinner

Fun with kids: Play a trivia game.

December 18: *O Lord and Ruler of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the flame of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come, and redeem us with outstretched arms.*

(Exodus 3:1-8; 20:1-20; Deuteronomy 26:5-9)

Activity idea: Bring this antiphon to life today by praying your evening prayer by candlelight as a family. Lead your family in a meditation on how the burning bush and the flame from the candle represent Jesus as the light of the world.

Recipe idea: Serve a hot and spicy dish for dinner tonight.

Fun with kids: In honor of the "ruler of the house," make and decorate gingerbread houses.

December 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.*

(Isaiah 11:1-4; 45:23; 52:13; Luke 1:32-33)

Activity idea: Research Jesus's family tree and how He is related to Jesse. Then trace your own family tree as far back as you can.

Recipe idea: Cook an entrée or side dish that uses "root" vegetables.

Fun with kids: Have "root" beer floats for a treat.

December 20: *O Key of David, O Royal Power of Israel controlling at your will the gate of heaven: 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.*

(Isaiah 22:22; 42:6-7; Luke 4:16-19)

Activity idea: This is a perfect opportunity to pray for all the people in prison. Have each person speak about some "prison" that they want to get out of—a prison of anger or moodiness or resentment or laziness, or some other prison. Jesus really wants to set us free!

Recipe idea: The monastic tradition on this night was for the monk in charge of the wine cellar to use his key to open the cellar and bring out a special bottle of wine. Serve a favorite bottle of wine or a sparkling fruit juice with your meal.

Fun with kids: Play an escape room game, or serve “key” lime pie for dessert.

December 21: *O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: Come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*

(Malachi 3:20; Isaiah 9:1; Psalm 107:14)

Activity idea: Take an outing tonight. Go around and look at the Christmas lights that are on display in your town or neighborhood. When you see the most dramatic displays – the ones that obviously took a lot of preparation – let them remind you of all the work that God put in preparing for the day when Jesus would bring His own light into the world.

Recipe idea: Cook some eggs, sunny-side-up, for breakfast.

Fun with kids: Oranges are great reminders of the Sun, so have a snack with oranges, make an orange smoothie, or serve “Sun” chips with lunch.

December 22: *O King of the gentiles and their desired One, the cornerstone that makes both one: Come, and deliver man, whom you formed out of the dust of the earth.*

(Isaiah 28:16; Genesis 2:7; Matthew 21:42; 1 Peter 2:4-5)

Activity idea: Talk about how Jesus is the foundation, the cornerstone, for your family, and for all the universe!

Recipe idea: Make a classic Chicken ala King for dinner.

Fun with kids: Bake a bundt cake and decorate it to look like a crown.

December 23: *O Emmanuel, God with us, our King and lawgiver, the expected of the nations and their Savior: Come to save us, O Lord our God.*

(Isaiah 7:14; Malachi 3:1; Matthew 1:21-23).

Activity idea: Talk about how the name Emmanuel means “God is with us.” And since Jesus is with us in a special way in the Blessed Sacrament, try as a family to spend some time in church praying before the tabernacle. Tell Jesus that you want Him to come into your hearts and into your home this Christmas.

Recipe idea: Serve traditional Middle Eastern foods for dinner tonight.

Fun with kids: Prepare the manger in your home for baby Jesus and read the Nativity story together.

*** December 24 is Vespers of the Christmas Vigil and does not have an *O Antiphon*.**