



### "O Clavis David..." (O Key of David)

*Reader:* "And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder; so he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open." (Isaiah 22:22)

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

### O COME, O COME, O KEY OF DAVID

Everybody looks for something to help them make sense of their difficult and bittersweet lives.

In the light of Christ, David's life makes sense.

In the light of Christ, ours does too.

David was one of the pieces that made up the fullness of time

and brought the word of God to culmination.

It was "from David's line"

that the Christ was to be born.

It is from our line

that the life of Christ is to be continued.

Christ must be the key, then,  
to where we work  
and how we think  
and what we say.

It is Christ by whom we live,  
the star by which we steer,  
the height to which we aspire.

It is Christ of Bethlehem  
who teaches us to identify with the poor.

It is the Christ of the Beatitudes  
who is the measure of what we value in life.

It is the Christ of Golgotha  
who shows us what in life  
is worthwhile laying down our lives for.

But so often,  
too often,

we look for the key to success  
and the key to wealth,  
rather than the Key of David.

How sad, the antiphon reminds us.

It is Christ, and Christ alone,  
who must be the key  
to what we do with our lives.

O Come, O Come O Key of David.



### **"O Oriens..." (O Dawn of the East/Dayspring)**

*Reader:* "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death a light has shone." (Isaiah 9:1)

**All:** O Rising Sun, you are the splendor of eternal light and the sun of justice. O come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

### **O COME, O COME, O FLOWER OF JESSE'S STEM**

Jesse was a nobody.  
At least nobody I know knows him.

Abraham, yes.

Noah, yes.

But who's Jesse?

Jesse was one of those people  
whose fidelity began a long line of faithfulness.

Historically speaking,

Jesse is just a name on a genealogical list.

The important thing is  
that Jesse's is a name in the list of the ancestors of Jesus.

Jesse was the forebear of David,  
the one who was able both to believe and to wait  
when there was little to believe in  
and nothing but a long-told promise to hope in.

Belief and patience come hard these days, too,  
but no harder surely than they did  
in time before when the promise seemed greater  
than the circumstances could presume.

When our own lives seem to reap no fruit,  
that's when we need to remember Jesse  
and the years of waiting

that he began in hope and faith.

We need, then, to promise ourselves  
that we will begin whatever we must in our own lives  
and trust that slowly, if only lowly,  
the fruits will come  
and the fruits will be of Christ.

O Come, O Come, O Flower of Jesse's Stem.



### **"O Radix Jesse..." (O Root of Jesse)**

*Reader::* "But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom....On that day, the root of Jesse, set up as a signal for the nations, the Gentiles shall seek out, for his dwelling shall be glorious." (Isaiah 11:1, 10)

**All: O root of Jesse, you stand as a signal for the nations; kings fall silent before you whom the peoples acclaim. O come to deliver us, and do not delay.**

### **O COME, O COME, O RADIANT DAWN**

There is little in life  
that doesn't have its dark spots.  
There aren't too many periods  
that are totally bright and totally clear  
and totally easy to see through.  
Everyone wonders at some time  
what the present is all about for them  
what the darkness means, what uncertainty or the agony  
or the struggle for life.  
But, for people for whom the Radiant Dawn rises in life,  
no amount of darkness is beyond the bearable.

Christ, the radiant Dawn,  
is the coming of hope in life.  
The problem is that, too often perhaps,  
we want the Good Life,  
we want our own way.  
We want independence more  
than we really want to shed  
our little private darknesses  
of selfishness and gain  
and irresponsibility.

We know intuitively  
that when we really allow the Dawn,  
the Sun of justice, that shines for others  
and lives for others  
and cares for others to seep into our lives,  
we'll have to give up our darkened, self centred ways.

But then we'll be free.  
Then life will be full of light.  
Then no amount of daily darkness  
will be able to shut out the insights  
that love and justice demand.

O Come, O Come, O Radiant Dawn.



### **"O Rex..." (O King of the Gentiles/Nations)**

*Reader:* "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:5)

**All:** O King whom all the peoples desire, you are the cornerstone which makes all one. O come and save us whom you made from clay.

### **O COME, O COME, O GOD OF STRENGTH**

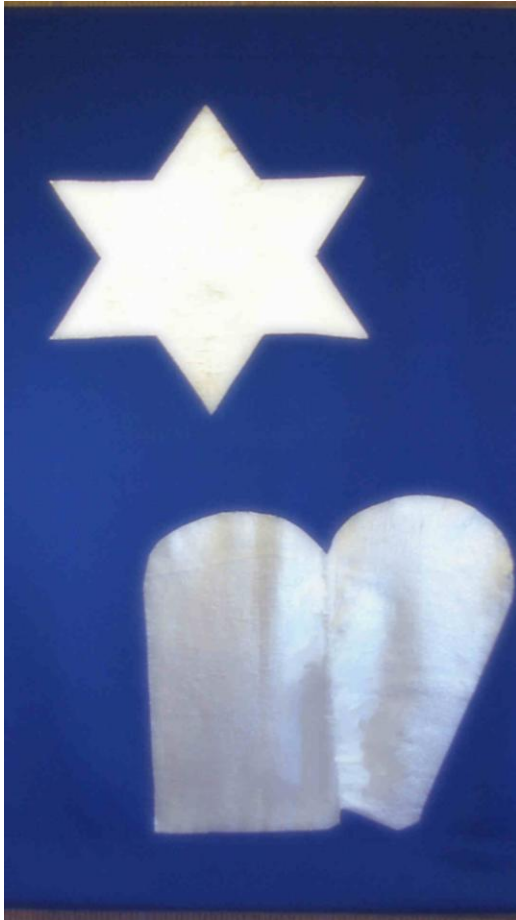
In this culture  
it's hard to know anymore  
what strength really is.  
We like power, of course,  
and we're very good at power.  
We collect nuclear weapons  
and corporate controls  
and political clout on the public level.  
We pout and  
we threaten  
and we punish in our private lives.  
Clearly we use power very effectively.  
But strength is something else.

Strength is what God gave to Moses, not power.  
It took strength to confront Pharaoh.  
It took strength to lead a motley band  
of unarmed slaves into a hostile desert.  
It took strength to trust  
that tapping a rock with a stick would save a people.  
It took strength to hold on to the vision of God  
in the face of a crowd  
that was searching for a more satisfying deity.

In this world of power, ironically,  
strength is still the key  
to bearing tired hopes  
and healing broken dreams  
and making holy confrontations  
and crossing the entire desert of our lives.  
Advent reminds us poignantly enough  
that power changes nothing.  
Strength does.

O Come, O Come, O God of Strength.





### **"O Adonai..." (O Lord and Ruler of the House of Israel)**

*Reader:* "But He shall judge the poor with justice, and decide aright for the land's afflicted. He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked. Justice shall be the band around his waist, and faithfulness a belt upon his hips." (Isaiah 11:4-5)

**All:** O Lord and Ruler 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.

### **O COME, O COME, O GOD OF ALL THE EARTH**

Perhaps the most revolutionary of all Israel's revelations is that God was not a tribal God.

God, Israel told us, was a God of all the earth.

Not Jewish. Not American. Not white. Not male.

The problem is that, once we come to know this too, we begin to look at all the world differently.

We begin to see the famished of Africa

the dispossessed of Central America

and the homeless in the middle east

and the over worked and underpaid women of the world as echoes of our own hopes and fears and desires and pain.

We begin to see life as it really is..

When God comes into our lives as the God of all the earth there is no room in our lives

for militaristic nationalism or sexism or racism.

The presence of God simply drives out the differences amongst

and makes our similarities more conscious to us than our political distinctions.

It is a rich and rarified moment in life to discover that skin colours and genders and accents and clothes are not only not obstacles in the coming reign of God but more, that we need them to reveal God in dazzling fullness.

At that moment, as Isaiah knew, the presence of God really became real.

O Come, O Come, O God of All the Earth.



### **"O Emmanuel..." (God with Us)**

*Reader:* "The Lord himself will give you this sign: the Virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

**All:** O Emmanuel, you are our king and judge, the One whom the peoples await and their Saviour. O come and save us, Lord, our God.

### **O COME, O COME, O WISDOM FROM ON HIGH**

Don't be fooled.

Knowledge and wisdom are not of a piece.

Knowledge the world has aplenty these days.

Computers spew it out;  
television overflows with it;  
printed materials heap it up  
in dusty piles from all the print shops  
to all the landfills of the world.

Wisdom is a rarer commodity.

Wisdom comes only when we begin to ask  
what all the knowledge has done for us.

Wisdom comes when we ask  
what we have made better by our knowledge.  
Wisdom comes only when we begin to scrutinize life  
through the eyes of God who is eternal wisdom,  
when we begin to look at what is in front of us  
and ask what God sees in what we're seeing.

For most people, wisdom is a by-product of experience.

For the holy, though,  
wisdom is a by-product of loving.

The wise love goodness.

The wise love creation.

The wise love the unlovable.

The wise love what they find in mangers,  
at the wrong time,  
in the wrong place,  
with the wrong people.

Indeed, it is wisdom, not knowledge  
that this smart but poor and violent world needs now.

O Come. O Come. O Wisdom from on high...



### "O Sapientia..." (O Wisdom)

*Reader:* "The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord, and his delight shall be the fear of the Lord." (Isaiah 11:2-3)

**All:** 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 to teach us the way of truth.

### O COME, O COME, O EMMANUEL

There's a wonderful irony in the seventh O Antiphon. "Emmanuel, God is with us" the antiphon prays, "be with us". It is a shining piece of cosmic dissonance.

Either God is with us, as the name Emmanuel implies, or God is not Emmanuel at all.

The question is, why would we call God who is already with us to be with us?

The answer clearly has nothing to do with God.

The answer is that there is something about us that keeps our ever present God at length in life.

We have so many other gods - our schedules, our opinions, our social positions

that god is more a devotion than a way of life.

The question is not *do we go to church*:

the question is have we been converted.

The crux of Christianity is not whether or not we give donations to the poor.

A consciousness of God does not lie

in bemoaning the state of the world

but in changing our own lives

in order to make life better for others.

So, in a perverse and prophetic way, this puts the responsibility for the coming of Christ exactly where it belongs:

in our own hearts, in our own lives,

in our own readiness to see where Christ is not and to bring him there.

But where does the readiness come from?

How shall we know when Christ has finally been allowed to be born into our lives?

The antiphons make it very clear.

When we come to live in the wisdom and strength of God rather than in knowledge alone or in violence;

when we allow our good acts to bear fruit, however far away, and make Christ the key of all we do;

when we let light into the dark places of our private worlds and realize God is not on the side of any people

but of all people

then truly God is with us and Christmas is forever.

*We stand for the reading of the Holy Gospel*  
*Reader: The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...*

**All: Glory be to thee, O Lord.**

Luke 1:26-38

*Reader: This is the Gospel of Christ.*

**All: Praise be to thee, O Christ.**

*We remain standing to sing*

### **Magnificat** (Luke 1: 46-55)

1. MY soul doth ' magnify ' the Lord:  
\*and my spirit hath re'joiced in ' God my ' Saviour.
  2. For ' he hath - re'garded:  
\*the ' lowli-ness of his ' handmaiden.
  3. For be'hold, from ' henceforth:  
\*all gene'rations shall ' call me ' blessed.
  4. For he that is mighty hath ' magni-fied ' me:  
\*and ' holy is his Name.
  5. And his mercy is on ' them that ' fear him:  
\*throughout ' all ' gene'rations.
  6. He hath showed ' strength - with his ' arm:  
\*he hath scattered the proud in the imagin'ation ' of  
their ' hearts.
  7. He hath put down the mighty ' from their ' seat:  
\*and hath ex'alted the ' humble and ' meek.
  8. He hath filled the ' hungry with ' good things:  
\*and the rich ' he hath sent ' empty a'way.
  9. He re'membering his ' mercy  
\*hath ' holpen his ' servant ' Israel:
  10. As he promised ' to our ' forefathers,  
\*Abraham ' and his ' seed for ' ever.
- Glory be to the Father and ' to the ' Son,  
\*and ' to the ' Holy ' Ghost;  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ' ever '  
shall be,  
\*world without ' end. ' A-men.

### **O Come, O Come, Emmanuel**

O come, O come, Emmanuel,  
and ransom captive Israel,  
that mourns in lonely exile here  
until the Son of God appear.

*Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice!*

***Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.***

O come, thou Wisdom from on high,  
who orderest all things mightily;  
to us the path of knowledge show,  
and teach us in her ways to go. *Refrain*

O come, thou Rod of Jesse, free  
thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
from depths of hell thy people save,  
and give them victory over the grave. *Refrain*

O come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer  
our spirits by thine advent here;  
disperse the gloomy clouds of night,  
and death's dark shadows put to flight. *Refrain*

O come, thou Key of David, come,  
and open wide our heavenly home;  
make safe the way that leads on high,  
and close the path to misery. *Refrain*

O come, O come, great Lord of might,  
who to thy tribes on Sinai's height  
in ancient times once gave the law  
in cloud and majesty and awe. *Refrain*

O come, Desire of nations, bind  
in one the hearts of all mankind;  
bid thou our sad divisions cease,  
and be thyself our King of Peace. *Refrain*

*Words: Latin, twelfth century; trans. John Mason Neale (1818-1866), 1851*



## The Great "O" Antiphons of Advent

In the traditional Liturgy of the Hours, Evening Prayer, also known as Vespers, always includes the great prayer of Mary known as the Magnificat. Each day, the Magnificat can be preceded by a short verse or "antiphon" that links the prayer to the feast of the day or the season of the year. In the last seven days of Advent (December 17-24), the antiphons before the Magnificat are very special. Each begins with the exclamation "O" and ends with a plea for the Messiah to come. As Christmas approaches the cry becomes increasingly urgent.

These moving "O Antiphons" were composed in the seventh or eighth century when monks put together texts from the Old Testament which looked forward to the coming of our salvation. They form a rich, interlocking mosaic of scriptural images. The great "O Antiphons" became very popular in the Middle Ages when it became traditional to ring the great bells of the church each evening as they were being sung.

Each Antiphon addresses Jesus with a unique title which comes from the prophecies of Isaiah, and whose initials, when read backwards, form an acrostic for the Latin "**Ero Cras**" which means "Tomorrow I come." Those titles for Christ are:

Sapientia (Wisdom)  
Adonai (Lord and Ruler)  
Radix Jesse (Root of Jesse)  
Clavis David (Key of David)  
Oriens (Rising Sun)  
Rex Gentium (King of the Nations)  
Emmanuel (God With Us)

In different order, these antiphons form the basis of the great advent hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel."

Information taken from "The Crossroads Initiative" <http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com> and from <http://www.freepublic.com> and from <http://www.hymnsandcarolsofchristmas.com>

## O Antiphon Litany

Anne Huneke

O Wisdom  
reveal the truth to us today  
and the truth for this hour and day,  
and the truth to comprehend  
the mystery of all creation.

O Leader of Israel,  
stretch out your mighty hand  
to free all of us who honour Moses as prophet.

O Flower of Jesse's stem  
help us to cherish our ancestry  
and to experience one another as family.

O Key of David,  
unlock the prisons in which  
we have walled ourselves off from others.

Radiant Dawn, shine on us  
and drive all the darkness from our lives.

King of all nations,  
help us to see this globe as one world,  
and its people as one in love.

Emmanuel,  
we desire that you be  
the God of our lives,  
that you save us  
from all that holds us down.  
Come and set us free.

## **A sample of websites with information on the O Antiphons**

Poetry, Reflection & Song to begin the Season of Advent  
(Grace Episcopal Church, Washington)

[http://www.gracehere.org/PDF/The\\_O\\_Antiphons.pdf](http://www.gracehere.org/PDF/The_O_Antiphons.pdf)

O Antiphons

(St Paul's Lutheran Church, Kingsville, MD)

<http://www.stpaulskingsville.org/oantiphons.htm>

Sapientia-tide: The Great O Antiphons

(Episcopal Cafe)

[http://www.episcopalcafe.com/daily/church\\_year/sapientiatide\\_the\\_great\\_o\\_anti.php](http://www.episcopalcafe.com/daily/church_year/sapientiatide_the_great_o_anti.php)

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

(Catholic Update)

<http://www.americancatholic.org/Newsletters/CU/ac1299.asp>

O Wisdom, Come

(The Brothers of John the Steadfast)

<http://steadfastlutherans.org/?p=12899>



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**St. Aidan's Anglican Church**

**274 Campbell Street**

**Winnipeg, MB R3N 1B5**

Phone (204) 489-3390

Fax (204) 488-6564

e-mail: [info@staidanswinnipeg.ca](mailto:info@staidanswinnipeg.ca)

[www.staidanswinnipeg.ca](http://www.staidanswinnipeg.ca)



# **O Antiphons**