

The “O Antiphons” of Advent:

A Prayer of Longing for the Messiah

Beginning on December 17, the Church enters the final days of Advent with a series of ancient and beautiful prayers known as the “O Antiphons.” These antiphons accompany the *Magnificat* during Evening Prayer and have been sung in the Roman Church since at least the eighth century.

Each antiphon begins with a title for the Messiah drawn from the prophet Isaiah and the wisdom of the Old Testament—Wisdom, Leader, Root, Key, Radiant Dawn, King, Emmanuel. These are names filled with longing, hope, and promise.

Every antiphon is a cry of the heart using the imperative “Come!” It is the plea of all humanity for God to break into our darkness with His light, to fulfill His ancient promises, and to bring salvation to His people.

Together they form a magnificent Advent theology:

- They look back to the Old Testament,
- They look forward to the coming of Christ,
- And they speak to the needs and longings we carry today—for wisdom, freedom, healing, justice, and peace.

(And for those who love hidden treasures: the first letters of each Latin title—Sapientia, Adonai, Radix, Clavis, Oriens, Rex, Emmanuel—spell out *ERO CRAS*, meaning “Tomorrow I will come.”)

The O Antiphons (December 17–23)

December 17 — O Wisdom

O Wisdom of our God Most High,
guiding creation with power and love:
come to teach us the path of knowledge!

December 18 — O Leader (O Adonai)

O Leader of the House of Israel,
giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai:
come to rescue us with your mighty power!

December 19 — O Root of Jesse

O Root of Jesse's stem,
sign of God's love for all his people:
come to save us without delay!

December 20 — O Key of David

O Key of David,
opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom:
come and free the prisoners of darkness!

December 21 — O Radiant Dawn (O Oriens)

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

December 22 — O King of the Nations

O King of all nations and keystone of the Church:
come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!

December 23 — O Emmanuel

O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law:
come to save us, Lord our God!