

The Great 'O' Antiphons for Advent II, 17th to 23rd December

The second part of Advent has its own special hymn:

O COME, Thou Wisdom whose decree
Doth govern all things peacefully;
The way of prudence here below
And life hereafter deign to show.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel.

2.O come, Thou everlasting Lord,
Who once by Israel's host adored
Thy dread commandment madest known,
In majesty of glory show.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel.

3.O Rod of Jesse, mystic bough,
From Satan's cruel snares do Thou,
From death's grim dungeon, we implore,
And hell's abyss Thine own restore.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel.

4.O come, Thou Key of David's store,
Unlock die heavenly gates once more;
Safe journey to Thy courts bestow,
And shut the way that leads below.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel.

5.O come, Thou Day star seen on high,
With healing for our hearts draw night;
Do Thou the mists of night dispel,
And death's foreboding darkness quell.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel.

6. O come, of Gentile hearts the King,
A world that needs Thee ransoming,
And save Thy servants, who confess
With humbled hearts their faithlessness.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel.

7.O come, O come, Emmanuel,
Redeem Thy captive Israel,
That doth in exile homeless mourn,
Until her Saviour Christ be born.
Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel
Is born to save thee, Israel.

The metrical translation above of the Great 'O' Antiphons for Advent was made by Msgr. Ronald Knox.

Anglicans, however, usually sing five verses (without *O Sapientia* and *O Rex Gentium*) and re-order the others, using J. M. Neale's translation:

O COME, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lowly exile here, Until
the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to save thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save, And
give them victory o'er the grave. Rejoice!
Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to save thee, O Israel.

The Latin original fits the same tune, *Veni Emmanuel*:

VENI, O Sapientia,
Quae hic disponis omnia,
Veni, viam prudentiae
Ut doceas et gloriae
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascitur pro te, Israel.

Veni, veni, Adonai,
Qui populo in Sinai
Legem dedisti vertice
In majestate gloriae.
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascitur pro te, Israel.

Veni, O Jesse virgula,
Ex hostis tuos ungula,
De specu tuos tartari
Educ et antro barathri.
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascitur pro te, Israel.

Veni, Clavis Davidica,
Regna reclude caelica,
Fac iter tutum supermini,
Et claude vias inferum.
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascitur pro te, Israel.

Veni, veni, O Oriens,
Solari nos adveniens,
Noctis depelle nebulas,
Dirasque mortis tenebras.
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascitur pro te, Israel.

Veni, veni, Rex Gentium,
Veni, Redemptor hominum,
Ut salves tuos famulos
Peccati sibi conscios.
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascitur pro te, Israel.

Veni, Veni, Emmanuel,
Captivum solve Israel,
Qui gemit in exilio,
Privatus Dei Filio.
Gaude, gaude, Emmanuel
Nascitur pro te, Israel.

O come, Thou Day-spring, come & cheer Our
spirits by Thine Advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, And
death's dark shadows put to flight. Rejoice!
Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to save thee, O Israel.

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.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to save thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of Might, Who
to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height, In ancient
times didst give the law
In cloud, and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to save thee, O Israel.

There are at least five other translations

These hymns paraphrase the *Magnificat* antiphons:

O Sapientia, quae ex ore
Altissimi prodiisti,
attingens a fine usque ad
finem, fortiter suaviterque
dispones omnia: veni ad
docendum nos viam
prudentiae.

O Adoni, et Dux domus
Israel, qui Moysi in igne
flamme rubi apparuisti, et
ei in Sina legem dedisti:
veni ad redimendum nos
in brachio extento.

O Radix Jesse, qui stas in
signum populorum, super
quem continebunt reges os
suum, quem Gentes
deprecantur: veni ad
liberandum nos, iam noli
tardare.

O Clavis David, et
sceptrum domus Israel;
qui aperis, et nemo
claudit; claudis, et nemo
aperit: veni ad educ
vincum de domo carceris,
sedentem in tenebris, et
umbrae mortis.

O Oriens, splendor lucis
aeternae, et sol iustitiae:
veni, et illumine sedentes
in tenebris, et
umbrae mortis.

O Rex Gentium, et
desideratus earum,
lapisque angularis, qui
facis utraque unum: veni,
et salva hominen, quem
de
O Emmanuel, *Rex et legifer*
noster, expectatio gentium,
et Salvator earum:
veni and salvandum nos
Domine Deus noster.

Our English Brevairy translates them:

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 Adonia and leader of the house 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 stock 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 key of David and sceptre 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 Rising Sun, You are the splendour of eternal light and justice. O come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O King Whom all the peoples desire, You are the cornerstone which makes all one. O come and save man whom You made from clay.

O Immanuel, You are king and judge, the One Whom the peoples await and their Saviour. O come and save us, Lord our God.

A quaint observation: The initial letters of the Latin of each antiphon read backwards are E R O C R A S, *era eras, "I shall come tomorrow!"* Was this deliberate?

The calendar in *The Book of Common Prayer* (i.e. Anglican) has December 16th as *O Sapientia*. But no further reference is made to its significance.

However, *The English Hymnal* of the high church Anglicans lists eight Great Advent Antiphons, beginning with December 16th and through to December 23rd. No doubt this reflects the Sarum (Salisbury) liturgy in Catholic pre-reformation England.

Their eighth antiphon *O Virgo virginum* is for Our Lady, on the day before Christmas Eve: **O Virgin of virgins, how shall this be? For neither before thee was any like thee, nor shall be after. Daughters of Jerusalem, why marvel ye at me? The thing which ye behold is a divine mystery.**

Note the change in style: there is no "O come" at the end because it is not addressed to Our Lord.

More on the Great 'O' Antiphons

Bible References

(If you find more, please let Father Tierney know)

O Wisdom: Ecclesiasticus 24:3; Wisdom 8:1.

O Lord: Exodus 3:2 and Judith 16:16 use Adonai; cf. Exodus 3:14.

O Root of Jesse: Isaiah 11:10; 52:15; Romans 15:12;

O Key of David: Apocalypse 3:7; Isaiah 22:22; 42:7; Jeremiah 51:19;

O Dayspring: John 8:12; Malachi 4:2; Luke 1:78; Hebrews 1:3; Wisdom 7:26.

O King of Gentiles: Romans 15:12; Isaiah 11:10; Haggai 2:8; Ephesians 2:20; 2:14; Genesis 2:7; ('Desire of the eternal hills,' Genesis 49:26).

O Emmanuel: Matthew 1:23; Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 7:14.

THE NOVUS ORDO lectionary uses the *Magnificat* antiphons as Alleluia verses for Mass from 17th to 23rd December. The Latin text is abbreviated from that in the *Liturgy of the Hours*, no doubt to fit the shorter format of Alleluia verses. Their order is different: 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 6, 6, 5. No. 6 is repeated so that the texts span the eight days from the 17th December to the morning of the 24th. In our lectionary they are rather freely translated by I.C.E.L. (International Committee on English in the Liturgy), and lose some of their poetic imagery and beauty.

A literal translation of the Latin is somewhat more inspiring:

O Sapientia, quae ex ore Altissimi prodiisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem, fortiter suaviterque disponens omnia: veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

O Wisdom, that proceedest from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from end to end, mightily and sweetly disposing all tilings: come and teach us the way of prudence.

O Adonai, et Dux domus Israel, qui Moysi in igne flammae rubi apparuisti, et ei in Sina legem dedisti: veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.

O Adonai, and Leader of the House of Israel, Who didst appear to Moses in the burning bush, and gavest him the Law on Sinai: come and redeem us by Thy outstretched arm.

O Radix Jesse, qui stas in signum populorum, super quern continebunt reges os suum, quern Gentes deprecabuntur: veni ad liberandum nos, jam noli tardare.

O Root of Jesse, who standest as a signal to the people, before Whom kings shall not open their lips; to Whom the Gentiles shall pray: come and deliver us, tarry now no more.

O Clavis David, et sceptrum domus Israel; qui aperis, et nemo claudit; claudis, et nemo aperit: veni, et educ vincitum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris, et umbra mortis.

O Key of David, and Sceptre of the House of Israel; Who openest, and no man shutteth; who shuttest, and no man openeth: come and lead the captive from the prison-house, and him that sitteth in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol justitiae: veni et illumina sedentes in tenebris, et umbra mortis.

O Orient, Spendour of the Eternal Light and Sun of Justice: come and enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O Rex Gentium, et desideratus earum, lapisque angularis, qui fads utraque unum: veni, et salva hominem, quern de limo formasti.

O King of the Gentiles, and the desire thereof, the Comer Stone that maketh both one: come and save man, whom Thou hast made from slime.

O Emmanuel, Rex et legifer noster, expectatio Gentium et Salvator earum: veni ad salvandum nos Domine Deus noster.

O Emmanuel, our King and Law-giver, the expectation of all nations and their Saviour: come and save us, O Lord our God.

Antiphons for the Epiphany

These antiphons extend the Epiphany: not just the visit of the Magi to the Infant Christ, but also the Baptism of Christ in the Jordan River and the Wedding Feast of Cana.

TODAY THE CHURCH has been joined to her heavenly Bride-groom, since Christ has purified her of her sins in the river Jordan; the Magi hasten to the royal wedding and offer gifts; the wedding guests rejoice since Christ has changed water into wine, Alleluia.

THREE WONDERS mark this holy day: the star led the Magi to the manger; water was changed into wine at the marriage feast; and Christ desired to be baptized by John in the river Jordan to bring us salvation, Alleluia.

ON THIS DAY the Magi pre-sented to the Lord three pre-cious gifts, signifying Divine Mysteries: gold, acknowledging His royal power; incense, His role as High Priest; and myrrh His burial.

THE MAGI CAME to Bethlehem from the East to adore the Lord; they opened their treasures and offered Him precious gifts: gold for a great king, frankincense for the true God, myrrh for His burial, Alleluia.

Hymn to Our Lady

(melody in *Brightest and Best, Stories of Hymns*, by Fr William George Rutler, §214)

YE who own the faith of Jesus Sing the wonders that were done, When the love of God the Father O'er our sins the victory won, When He made the Virgin Mary Mother of His only Son. Hail Mary, full of grace.

2. Blessèd were the chosen people Out of whom the Lord did come, Blessèd was the land of promise Fashioned for His earthly home; But more blessèd far the Mother She who bore Him in her womb. Hail Mary, full of grace.

3. Wherefore let all faithful people Tell the honour of her name, Let the Church in her foreshadowed Part in her thanksgiving claim; What Christ's Mother sang in gladness Let Christ's people sing the same. Hail Mary, full of grace.

4. Let us weave our supplications, She with us and we with her, For the advancement of the faithful, For each faithful worshipper, For the doubting, for the sinful, For each heedless wanderer. Hail Mary, full of grace.

5. May the Mother's intercessions On our homes a blessing win, That the children all be prospered, Strong and fair and pure within, Following the Lord's own footsteps, Firm in faith and free from sin. Hail Mary, full of grace.

6. For the sick and for the agèd, For our dear ones far away, For the hearts that mourn in secret, All who need our prayers today, For the faithful gone before us, May the holy Virgin pray. Hail Mary, full of grace.

7. Praise, O Mary, praise the Father, Praise thy Saviour and thy Son, Praise the everlasting Spirit, Who hath made thee ark and throne O'er all creatures, high exalted, Lowly praise the Three in One Hail Mary, full of grace.. Amen.

Antiphon for 1st January:

IN THE BUSH which Moses saw burning and not consumed we acknowledge thy praiseworthy virginity. O Mother of God, intercede for us.