
Meditation On The “O Antiphons”

Worship Note: The great “O Antiphons” of Advent have been cherished by Christians since the eighth century. Normally used from December 17th to December 23rd, the “O Antiphons” are unique in that each “O Antiphon” contains a title of Christ in the Old Testament and a prayer that the Lord would come to fulfill His promised Word.

The Advent hymn “*Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Immanuel*” is based on the “O Antiphons”. As we prepare for the Lord’s coming, we join the Christians from all ages in our prayer that God’s promise of salvation would also be fulfilled among us as we return, repent, and renew our hearts in Advent preparation.

Sermon:

One of my favorite Advent Traditions is the use of the “O Antiphons.” It’s an ancient liturgical practice which has been observed in the church for centuries to prepare for Jesus’ coming.

The word “Antiphon” is a Latin word. “Anti” means to “share back and forth” and “phon” (like our words “phonics” and “telephone”) refers to “sounds.” So an “antiphon” is a sharing of sounds, back and forth. In the church, an antiphon is like a two-way dialog. One person says something, another responds to it. That is an antiphon.

As I prepared this message, I wondered why the ancient church has used the “O Antiphons” for Advent. I think the reason they did is that they wanted a simple, yet profound way, to help people know the most important things about Jesus. The song “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is the song written around the O Antiphons. This song was just another simple, yet effective way, to remind people of the importance of Jesus.

In preparation for Jesus’ coming, the ancient Church felt it important to remind people of who Jesus is and how important He is to their lives.

That’s the task of the church today, too. The church’s proclamation is always centered in Jesus Christ, who He is, and His importance to our lives. There’s no more important time for us to celebrate than at Advent.

In the coming weeks we’ll be making trips to stores to get Christmas gifts. We’ll certainly get excited as we hear the Christmas songs and get ready for Christmas family gatherings. But, without Jesus, all of these celebrations and actions are really worthless.

As we take the next four weeks to prepare for Jesus’ coming, the O Antiphons redirect our Christmas focus back to where it should be—toward Christ. So, with the ancient church, today we review the O Antiphons and, like the ancients, direct our Advent preparation to Jesus Christ. Oh, come, Oh Come, Emmanuel!!!

✍ ANTIPHON I: “JESUS, OUR SOURCE OF WISDOM” ✍

MEDITATION: *“Adam and Eve Seek Wisdom”*

“When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.” *Genesis 3:6*

The first thing the Ancient Church wanted to remind us was that Jesus is the Wisdom from on high. No matter how smart, brilliant or intelligent we might be, if we do not have faith in Jesus, we’re nothing stupid, idiotic morons. The only true wisdom is in Jesus.

The ancients, as they looked to the Old Testament, could see many examples of people seeking wisdom apart from Christ. In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sought wisdom. They thought they could get it from eating the fruit of a tree. Satan deceived them...and they deceived each other. As a result of their futile, foolish pursuit of wisdom, they sinned.

God saw their foolishness. When He came to them, He did not condemn them to hell. Instead, He directed them to true wisdom. By His promise to send Jesus Christ, He directed the first people on earth to Jesus. As they trusted in God’s promise, they grew in Wisdom.

This Advent, we celebrate Jesus. He is our Wisdom. Apart from Him, there is no other. Come, thou wisdom from on high. Come to us today!

PRAYER FOR WISDOM:

All: Lord Jesus Christ, so many times we seek the wisdom of this world for guidance in our lives. Come into our lives this Advent, that we might know God’s will for our lives with the wisdom that only You can give. In Your name we pray. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Immanuel”

Oh, come, our Wisdom from on high,
Who ordered all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go.

***Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to you, Oh Israel!***

✍ ANTIPHON II: “JESUS, THE ONLY TRUE GOD” ✍

MEDITATION: *“God Makes Himself Known”*

“Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” *Exodus 3:13-14*

What is the most important thing to know about Jesus? It’s that He is God! Born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus was truly man. But, conceived by the Holy Spirit, He was truly God.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges God has had in all times was convincing people He was God. As the ancients looked over the Scriptures, they recalled how many times—and how many prophets—struggled to make God known as the only true God.

Perhaps the greatest example of this occurred in Moses’ calling at the burning bush. When God called Moses to rescue the people of Israel from Egyptian slavery, Moses asked, “What is your name, God? What can I tell people who you are?”

God’s response was, “I AM who I Am.”

As we prepare for Jesus’ coming this Advent, we are preparing for Him who called Himself the “I am.” The Gospel of John notes that Jesus said of Himself, “I am the Good Shepherd.” “I am the Bread of Life.” “I am the Way, The Truth, and the Life.”

Jesus, the ancients reminded us, is God. And so we join them in longing for His coming. Come, Lord Jesus. Come to us, Son of God. Oh, come, oh, come, Emmanuel!

PRAYER FOR REDEMPTION:

All: Lord, when You appeared to Moses, You showed that You are the only true God, the Living One. As we await Your Advent appearance, show us Your power. Move us to worship and receive You as our Redeemer and Lord. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Immanuel”

Oh, come, oh, come, our Lord of Might,
Who to your tribes on Sinai’s height
In ancient times gave holy law,
In cloud and majesty and awe.

***Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to you, Oh Israel!***

✍ ANTIPHON III: “JESUS, THE HOLY ROOT OF JESSE” ✍

THE MEDITATION: Isaiah 11:1-3

A Shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from His roots a Branch will bear fruit.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord—and He will delight in the fear of the Lord.

One of the important aspects of Jesus, the ancients reminded us, was that He was the “Holy Root of Jesse.”

But, before we get too far, does anyone here know who Jesse is? He’s the father of King David, the greatest of all of Israel’s kings.

As the ancients looked toward the coming of Jesus, they recalled the Kingdom of David. They recalled David who, himself, was from the genealogical “tree” of Jesse. He’s the first of Jesse’s descendant to be a great ruler in Israel. Jesse’s grandson, Solomon, was yet another.

As they recalled these two great rulers and the golden ages during which they ruled, the people of Israel waited for greatest One who would come from Jesse’s root: Jesus.

Whereas the kings David and Solomon could only rule politically in a material world, the kingdom of Jesse’s greatest descendant, Jesus, would rule over all. Whereas David and Solomon’s kingdoms rose and fell, Jesus’ kingdom lasts forever.

Oh, come, O Root of Jesse, free us. Jesus, deliver us from Satan and into your eternal Kingdom of Grace.

PRAYER FOR REDEMPTION:

All: Lord, according to Your promise You sent Jesus Christ to us. As Jesse and all the people of God awaited Your birth, help us to wait expectantly for the signs of Your coming. Come quickly to deliver us, Lord. Give us Your salvation. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Immanuel”

Oh, come, O Root of Jesse, free
Your own from Satan’s tyranny;
From depths of hell Your people save
And give them vict’ry o’er the grave.

***Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to you, Oh Israel!***

✍ ANTIPHON IV: “JESUS, HOLDER OF DAVID’S KEY” ✍

THE MEDITATION: Isaiah 22:21

“I will place on His shoulder the key to the house of David; what He opens no one can shut, and what He shuts no one can open.”

Everyone of us knows how important these are, right? (Holding A set of keys). Probably all of us have been locked out of our house or car. Why? Because we didn’t have our keys.

Keys are important to us. They were also important to the ancients. Keys open and shut. Keys unlock and lock. Keys protect and give access. Keys make the difference between being in or being out.

Jesus is the most important “key” we have in our lives. As the ancients looked forward to Jesus coming, they looked forward to His greatest act: to use His key to open heaven to us.

As Jesus was the key to their lives, he’s also the key to our lives, too. He is the one who opens doors for us. He uses His keys to open the gates of heaven to us. He opens the door of God’s love and grace...and lets each of us in.

The most important thing He does in our lives, however, is that He uses His key of His word to open our heart to Him. This Advent, our response is that we would open our hearts to Him who is the “key” to our lives. Oh, Come, Thou Key of David, come! Open wide our heav’nly home!

PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE:

All: Jesus, You are ruler of all creation. As Lord of heaven and earth, You hold the keys of power and grace. Use the power of Your keys to release our sins and open our hearts to serve You. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: “OH, COME, OH, COME, EMMANUEL”

Oh, Come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heav'nly home;
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery.

Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to you, Oh Israel!

✍ ANTIPHON V: “JESUS, THE DAWNING STAR” ✍

THE MEDITATION: Numbers 24:16

"I see Him, but not yet; I behold Him, but only faintly in the distance. A Star will come out of Jacob; a Scepter will rise out of Israel."

One of my favorite things to do when I'm on vacation in Daytona Beach, Florida, is to walk on the beach at night. As I walk, I enjoy looking at the stars in the early evening. Later in the evening, I take another walk, and notice the position of the stars have changed, some new stars have appeared, and some are no longer visible.

The ancient world had a preoccupation with stars. Whole religions were based on the movements of the stars. The Magi who visited Jesus saw the star in the east and knew something important, something momentous had occurred.

This Advent, we're preparing to welcome a "star." No, not a Hollywood-style star. Instead, we're preparing to welcome Jesus, the "Dawning Star." The "Dawning Star" is a special star. It's the star that brings in a new day.

Jesus, our Dawning Star, brings us a new day, too. He brings us out of the darkness of the darkest nights of the day of evil, to a new day...a day of Grace, a day of love, a day of forgiveness, a day of salvation.

Oh, what a GREAT day it will be when Jesus comes this Christmas! Oh, come, O Dayspring from on high. Cheer us by Your new day!!

PRAYER FOR LIGHT:

All: Jesus, You are the Light which dawns upon our lives. Come to us and show us Your light. Bring, we pray, the fullness of Your dawning grace. Lead and lighten our lives as we prepare for Your Advent coming. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Immanuel”

Oh, come, O Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Your drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night
And death's dark shadows put to flight.

Refrain: *Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to you, Oh Israel!*

✍ **ANTIPHON VI: “JESUS, THE KING OF ALL NATIONS”** ✍

THE MEDITATION: “Jesus Is King of All”

“The Lord is the true God; He is the living God, the eternal King. When He is angry, the earth trembles; the nations cannot endure His wrath....Pour out Your wrath, O Lord, on the nations that do not acknowledge You, on the peoples who do not call on Your name.” Jeremiah 10:10, 25

From the moment that God gave Israel it's first King, King Saul, their greatest hope was that they would be a “great nation.” This hope, based on God's promise to Abraham, was that the nation would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore.

They didn't merely want to be a great nation. They wanted to be the greatest nation in the world. Many of the prophets wrote how nations would stream toward Jerusalem and every nation would be subjected to Israel.

These prophecies, however, were not intended to be political prophecies. Instead, they looked forward to the time when Jesus as King of Kings and Lord of Lords would subject all nations to His love and grace.

St. Paul, in his letter the Philippians reminds us that, as a result of Jesus' victory over death on the cross, that
“God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”
Philippians 2:9-11 (NIV)

This is what the ancients wanted us to know in this O Antiphon. They wanted everyone everywhere to know Jesus is not just a King. He's the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The only question that remains is, “Will you receive Him as your king?”

Oh, come, King of Kings. Come into our hearts today!

PRAYER FOR THE NATIONS:

All: Jesus, You came to save all people of every nation and language. Withhold Your wrath from sinners. Give power to Your Word that we might proclaim to others Your limitless love and forgiveness to all nations. Lord, You are the King of Kings and

Lord of Lords. Let every nation and every tongue prepare to receive and worship You. Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Immanuel”

Oh, come, Desire of Nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Oh, bid our sad divisions cease,
And be Yourself our King of Peace.

***Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to you, Oh Israel!***

✍ ANTIPHON VII: “GOD IS WITH US IN JESUS” ✍

THE MEDITATION: Isaiah 7:14

“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call Him, ‘Immanuel.’”

The most important thing we can know about Jesus is simply this: Is He here? Is He really?

In this antiphon the ancients wanted people then and now to know—and never doubt—that Jesus is really here!

It wasn’t just their concern. It was God’s, too. That’s the promise Isaiah gave to King Ahaz in Isaiah 7. When the king doubted that God was there, Isaiah gave the King the “Immanuel” sign. “God is with us!” Isaiah proclaimed. Unfortunately, King Ahaz doubted.

Do you ever doubt that Jesus is with you? Do you ever think that God has left you? Advent reminds us that Jesus is our Immanuel. He is not only a reminder that God is with us. But, as God Himself, He IS God-made-flesh. He is with us today.

Come, Oh Come, Emmanuel! Even so, come Lord Jesus!

PRAYER FOR IMMANUEL:

All: Jesus, You are “Immanuel.” We long for Your coming. We long for You to be with us. Give us Your love, show us Your face, and reveal to us Your presence each day. Come quickly, Lord! Come to us and never leave us! Amen.

CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE: “Oh, Come, Oh, Come, Immanuel”

Oh, come, oh, come Immanuel,
And ransom captive Israel
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appears.

***Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Immanuel
Shall come to you, Oh Israel!***