

ADVENT 2023

O Antiphons

THE ADVENT ANTIPHONS OF THE ANCIENT CHURCH

An Evening for Anticipation



Cover image: O Sapientia in Antiphonary no. 1 (MS 246, 40r; University of Michigan)
Illuminated by Benedetto Bordone, c. 1500 in Venice

About the Antiphons

The O Antiphons, sometimes called the Great Antiphons, are refrains to the Magnificat sung at evening prayer on the last seven days of Advent. These antiphons anticipate the time when Jesus will come and right all wrongs: the proud and mighty will be brought low, and the humble and weak will be lifted up; the hungry will be fed, and the rich will be sent away. Each O Antiphon follows a specific pattern which meditates on our hopes for Christ—the chant addresses Jesus by one of his titles, elaborates on what that title means, and ends with our request for Jesus to come. Today, you may be more familiar with the O Antiphons through the modern carol “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel,” translated from a Latin paraphrase of the ancient texts.

The formal arrangement of the O Antiphons likely dates to the 6th century, and by the 9th century they had become features of the Advent season leading up to Christmas. We still have detailed accounts of their early performance! The text of the Great Antiphons comes from biblical passages, reorganized to form these poems. The prophet Isaiah provides the bulk of the phrases, but lines from Sirach, Wisdom, Exodus, Proverbs, Malachi, Hebrew, and Luke also comprise the lyrics. Although more O Antiphons were recorded in medieval texts, these seven (*Sapientia, Adonai, Radix Jesse, Clavis David, Oriens, Rex Gentium, and Emmanuel*) were designed as a group and became the standard for evening prayer.

About the Performance

Tonight, we invite you to join us in singing the Gregorian chants of the O Antiphons, following the music in this booklet. Don't worry, our Advent Schola will guide you! These melodies are the ones used by the ancient Church to sing the antiphons, and we are excited for you to learn them with us. After each chant, our schola will sing a more elaborate response. There will be a brief moment of silence between the antiphons; please hold your applause until the end of the concert.

Order of Events:

<i>Let my Prayer come up as the Incense</i>	arr. Hallock (1987)
<i>The Great “O” Antiphons</i>	arr. Hallock (1986)
<i>In Dulci Jubilo</i> (organ)	arr. Bach (BWV 729)
<i>In Dulci Jubilo</i>	arr. Van Wye (2020)

Allyn McCourt, *conductor*

Timothy Zimmerman, *organist*

Paula Gomez Victorica, *script*

Chase Hockema, *program*

Readers

Paula Gomez Victorica
Tony Compagnone
Rita Rodriguez

Schola

Rachel S. Webb
Laura Santamaria
Aurora Martin
Deborah Valianti
Stephanie Planchart
Jayne Losey

Paige Hornor

Mary Ann Hill

Kate Burns

Jade Espina

Emerald Barbour

Monica Sidor

Lucille Beer Goldstein

Mary Brown

Rose Ake

Jim ‘Strad’ Engler

Kartik Ayyasola

Jackson Alfrey

Jesse Michael Hann

Juan Suarez



From *Great Antiphons*, illuminated by Edith A. Ibbs
London, 1905

Courtesy of the Department of Special Collections,
Stanford University Libraries (*MSS Codex 1410*)

O Antiphons

Lyrics in hopeful exaltation of Christ

O Sapientia introduces the Advent sequence, and at first glance, a cry for Wisdom may seem like an odd start. However, in the Old Testament, Wisdom comes down from above to be closer to humanity below—this is exactly the request we have for Jesus during Advent.

The O Antiphons offer us a neat framework for Advent theology, developing themes of messianic hopes fulfilled in Christ's first and second comings. Even beyond the spiritual overtures, these ancient antiphons speak to some of the most profound human desires, longings for stability and reason, justice and freedom, a belief that a better world is always possible.

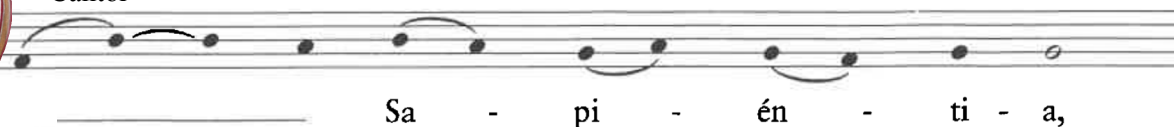
“O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.”

Cf. Sirach 24:1–8; Wisdom 8:1; Proverbs 9:6; John 1:3

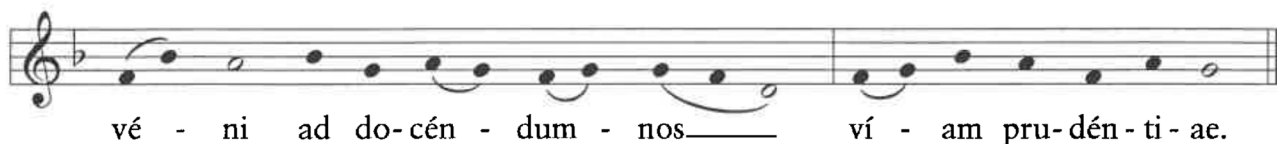
O Sapientia



Cantor



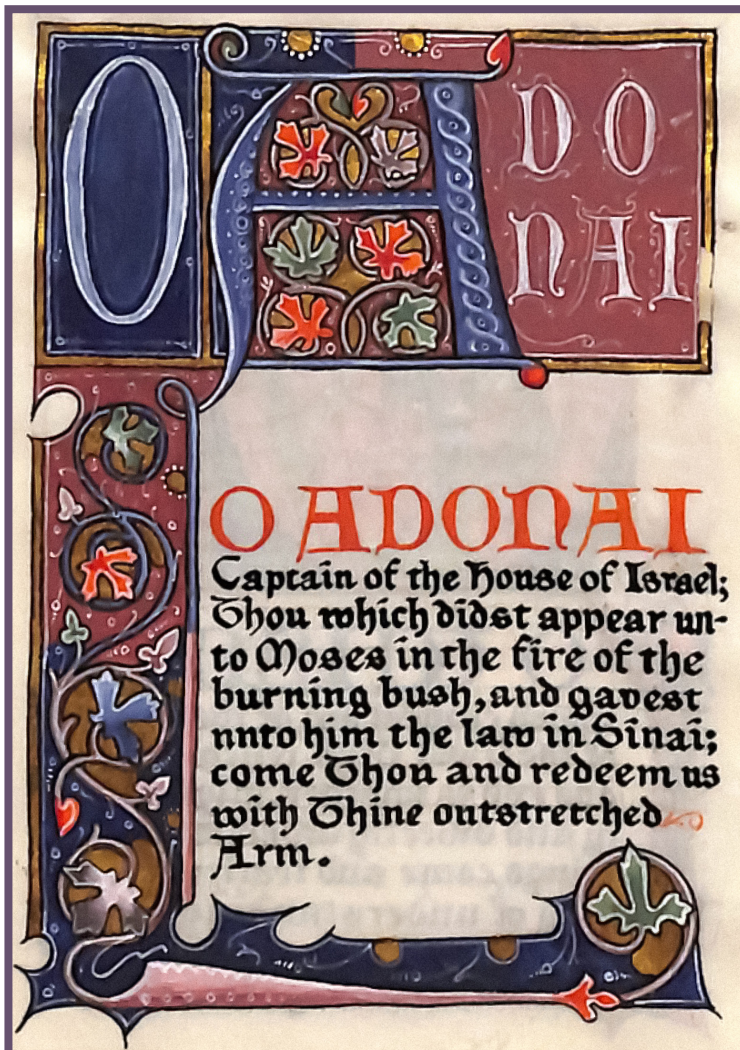
All



O Adonäi

Cantor All

A - do - ná - i et Dux dó-mus Is - ra - el,
 qui Mó - y - si in íg - ne flám - mae rú - bi ap - pa - ru - í - sti
 et é - i in Sí - na lé - gem de - dí - sti: vé - ni ad re - di - mén - dum nos
 in brá - chi - o ex - tén - to.



“O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.”

Cf. Exodus 3, 6:2–3; 2 Chronicles 6:5; Leviticus 27:34

This antiphon recalls when God revealed his name to Moses out of the burning bush, calling himself “I am Who I am.” Jesus becomes the fullness of God’s name—Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the divine word by which we can see God. He is Adonai, the Lord, the perfect expression of God.



lib. san

O SAPIENTIA QUE ex ore altissimi pdisti amingens a fine usq. ad finem foriter
suauiter disponensq. omnia. Veni addocendum nos uiam prudentie.

Exod^o

O adonay & dux domus israhel qui mbyssi in igne flamme rubi apparuisti & ei in
syna legem dedisti. Veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extenso. *Umbra moras.*

Clayn^o

O radix dauid qui stas in signum populorum sup quem conuenerunt reges of suum
quem gentes deprecabuntur. Veni ad liberandum nos iam noli tardare.

Clayn^o

O claus dauid & sceptrum domus israhel qui aperis & nemo claudit claudis
& nemo aperit. Veni & educ uinctos de domo carceris sedentes in tenebris &

Clayn^o

O orienti splendor lucis eterne & sol iusticie Veni & illumina sedentes in
tenebris & umbra moras. *Uisita & eos illuc reuoca unde ruerit p. culpam.*

agg^o

O rex gentium & desideratus earum lapisq. angularis qui facis utraq. unum.
Veni salua hominem quem delimo formasti. *saluandum nos dne deus noster.*

Canne

O rex pacifice tu ante secula nate paup. iam egredere portam, redemptos tuos

Clayn^o

O emmanuel rex & legis noster expectatio gentium & saluator earum. Veni ad



O *Radix Jesse* comes from Isaiah 11, which prophesies that a king will come who will be descended from David the son of Jesse. Jesus is a root, branch, or offshoot that is part of Jesse's family tree, and this antiphon remembers the genealogy and legacy behind his birth.

The Tree of Jesse gained elaborate expression in the Middle Ages. Illuminated manuscripts, stained glass windows, wall and ceiling paintings, and stone carvings all depicted Jesus' lineage as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

Traditionally, Jesus appears as a flowering branch held by Mary at the top of the tree. This imagery became the inspiration for the German carol "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming," which celebrates both Mary and Jesus as the descendants of David through Jesse.

"O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer: Come and deliver us, and delay no longer."

Cf. Isaiah 11:10; Isaiah 52:15

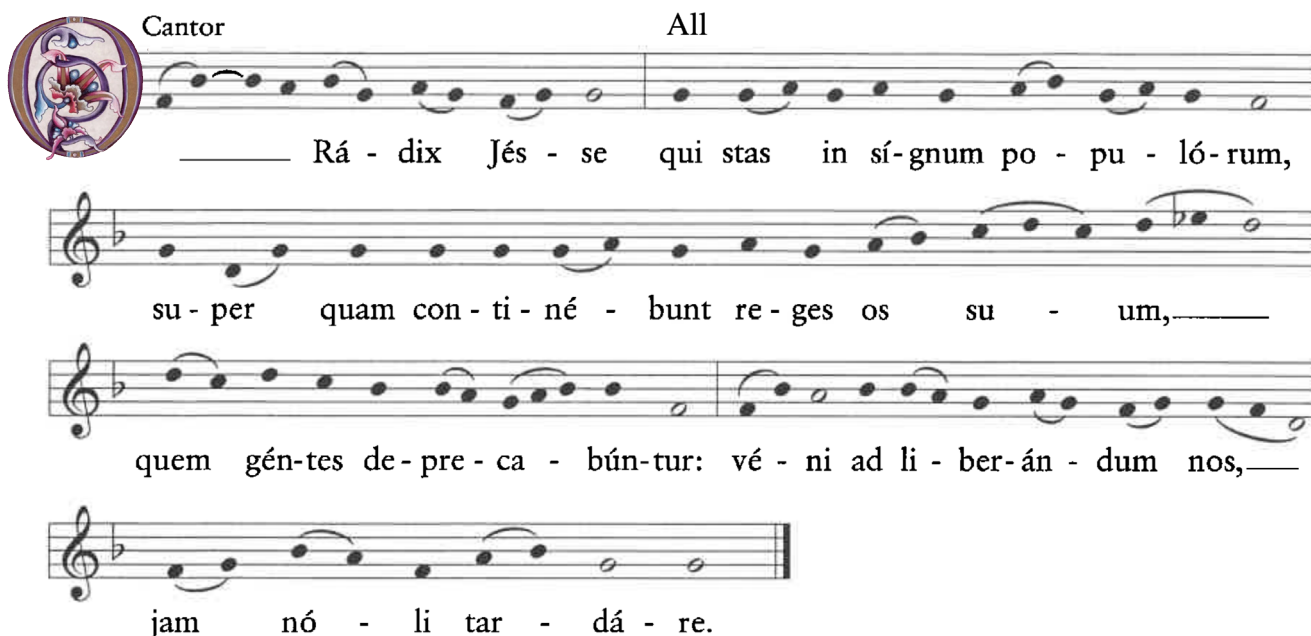
"Part of the appeal of the O Antiphons is that they express an urgent longing, addressed to Christ, [for] the kind of things we all desire but can rarely or never find in this world: perfect wisdom, peace, justice, true freedom, light in the darkness, companionship which will never fail us."

—Eleanor Parker

Lecturer in Medieval English Literature,
Brasenose College, Oxford

O Radix Jesse

Cantor All



Rá - dix Jés - se qui stas in sí - gnum po - pu - ló - rum,
su - per quam con - ti - né - bunt re - ges os su - um,
quem gén - tes de - pre - ca - bún - tur: vé - ni ad li - ber - án - dum nos,
jam nó - li tar - dá - re.

Like *O Radix Jesse*, *O Clavis David* may need some explanation as a title for Jesus. Isaiah 22 foretells of one who will receive the “key of the house David,” which grants the authority to open the doors of death and free humanity from that darkness. Jesus, who is himself that key, was able to conquer death and lead us into life and light.

“O Key of David and scepter of the House of Israel; you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open: Come and lead the captives from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.”

Cf. Isaiah 22:22, 42:7; Matthew 16:19; Luke 1:79; Revelation 3:7



O Clavis David

Cantor All

Cla - vis Da - vid et scép - trum do - mus Is - ra - el
 qui a - pe - ris et ne - mo cláu - dit
 cláu - dis, et né - mo á - pe - rit:
 ve - ni et é - duc vínc - tum de dó - mo cár - ce - ris,
 se - dén - tem in té - ne - bris et úm - bra mór - tis.



I am the root and
offspring of David,
**the bright
morning star.**

Revelation 22:16

Oriens is a bit harder to translate than the other titles given in the antiphons. The word, variously translated as Morning Star, Dayspring, Radiant Dawn, and Rising Sun, refers to the sun which rises in the east to signal the dawn of a new day. Jesus' birth likewise signals the start of a new life for the world.

“O Morning Star, splendor of the light eternal and sun of righteousness: Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.”

Cf. Luke 1:78–79; Wisdom 7:26; Malachi 4:2; Hebrew 3:20; Numbers 24:17; 1 John 1:5

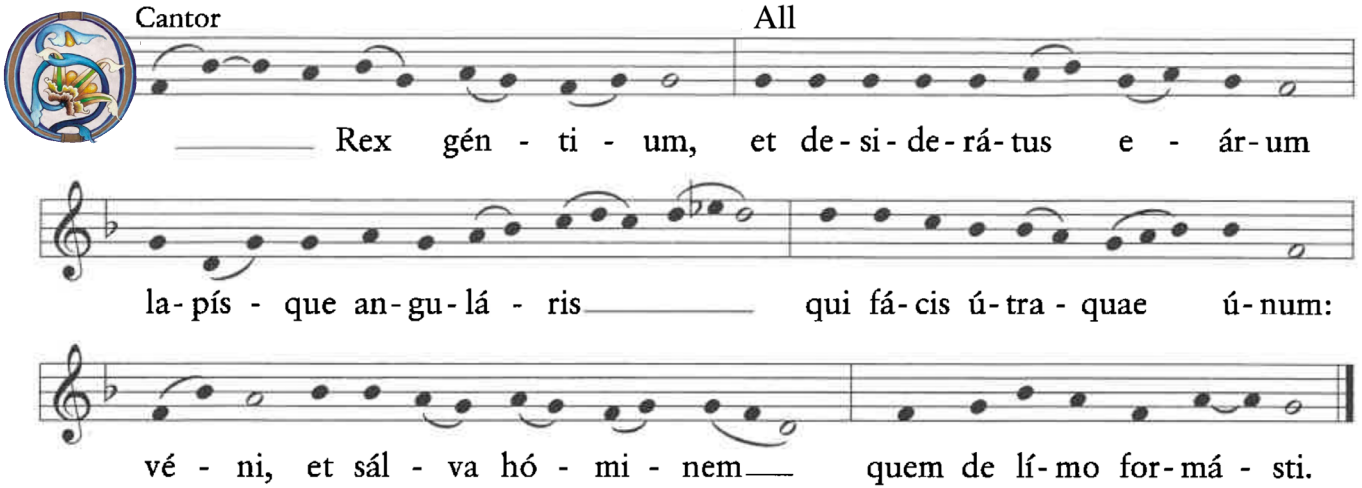
O Oriens

Cantor All

O - ri - ens splén - dor lú - cis ae - tér-nae,
 et sol ju - stí - ti - ae: vé - ni et il - lú - mi - na
 se - dén - tes in té - ne - bris et úm - bra mór - tis.

O Rex gentium

Cantor All



Rex gén - ti - um, et de - si - de - rá - tus e - ár - um
la - pís - que an - gu - lá - ris qui fá - cis ú - tra - quae ú - num:
vé - ni, et sál - va hó - mi - nem quem de lí - mo for - má - sti.

“O King of the nations, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one: Come and save the human race, which you fashioned out of clay.”

Cf. Jeremiah 10:7; Haggai 2:8; Isaiah 28:16; Ephesians 2:14; Genesis 2:7; Psalm 118:22

The King of all creation, who shaped humanity out of clay, took on our same earthly form. The Creator became his creation, and for this reason he is both the cornerstone and the capstone of our faith, the foundation and the pinnacle, the beginning and the end.

Imperial Cathedral of Königsutter, Germany
Painting of Christ Pantocrator in the apsis
c. 1135



They shall call his name **Emmanuel,** **God with Us.**

Matthew 1:23

Finally, the O Antiphons give us Jesus' most significant title, the title at the center of season: Emmanuel, God with us. Jesus has come down to earth to dwell among humanity, to be God with us in the flesh.

“O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Savior: Come and save us, O Lord our God.”

Cf. Isaiah 7:14, 33:22; Genesis 49:10; 1 Timothy 4:10; Matthew 28:20



O Emmanuel



Cantor

All

Em - mán - u - el Rex et lé - gi - fer nós - ter,
ex - spec - tá - ti - o gén - ti - um et Sal - vá - tor e - ár - um:
vé - ni ad sal - vá - dum nos Dó - mi - ne Dé - us nós - ter.





The Virgin and Child in the Grimbold Gospels
 Canterbury, Eleventh Century
 (BL Add. 34890, f. 115; British Library)

- O Sapientia**
- O Adonai**
- O Radix Jesse**
- O Clavis David**
- O Oriens**
- O Rex Gentium**
- O Emmanuel**

In Dulci Jubilo

In Sweet Rejoicing

The Advent Antiphons guide the Church to Christmas, preparing her to sing joyfully at the birth of the Savior. Jesus, whom the antiphons invoke, finally appears and brings with him all that the world longs for. What other response can there be but sweet rejoicing?

In dulci jubilo
 Let us our homage show!
 Our heart's joy reclineth
In praesepio;
 And like a bright star shineth
Matris in gremio.
Alpha es et O!

O Jesu parvule,
 My heart is sore for Thee!
 Hear me, I beseech Thee,
O puer optime;
 My prayer let it reach Thee,
O princeps gloriae.
Trahe me post te.

O patris caritas!
O Nati lenitas!
 Deeply were we stained
Per nostra crimina;
 But Thou for us hast gained
Coelorum gaudia:
 O that we were there!

Ubi sunt gaudia,
 If that they be not there?
 There are angels singing
Nova cantica;
 There the bells are ringing
In Regis curia.
 O that we were there!



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The illuminated Os accompanying each antiphon were illustrated by the nuns at the Benedictine Abadía Santa Escolástica in Buenos Aires.