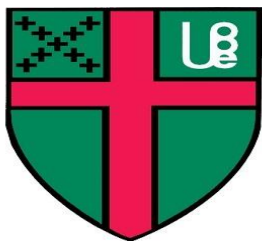


O Antiphons Reflections



Episcopal Networks Collaborative
Advent 2018

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INTRODUCTION TO THE O ANTIPHONS REFLECTIONS

Many of us wait with expectation for that Sunday in Advent when we will sing the hymn O Come O Come Emmanuel.

The hymn was part of my family tradition as our kids were growing up and we would sing a few stanzas every evening with our Advent devotions. To this day I continue to sing stanzas of O Come O Come Emmanuel with my Advent devotions, but, in compliance with the liturgical placement of them beginning on December 17th-23rd. It is also part of my liturgical hardware to keep Advent as a season of hope and expectation.

For those of us in the Northern Hemisphere, Advent is the time of year when the days are the shortest and darkest. This helps us to see that Jesus was born into a world of Roman oppression and economic inequality.

Jesus leads us from despair to hope, this is a part of the Advent theme.

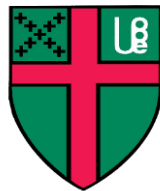
We invite you to read and ponder the following reflections on the O Antiphons written by individuals across the country fostering the hope Jesus brings to despair everyday as we encounter people in our daily lives: immigrants, low wage workers, targets of hate crimes and those fighting corporate greed which threatens sacred lands with environmental destruction.

This year we remember those who have experienced violence of any kind and those who have experienced storms and floods.

Dianne Aid, TSSF
The Episcopal Network for Economic Justice
Advent, 2018

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

These O Antiphons Reflections are part of the Joint Education and Advocacy effort of the Episcopal Networks Collaborative. Last year we offered justice reflections for the Sundays of Advent. This year, we provided a Lenten Reflection Series and Reflections for the Creation Season. This year we offered Reflections for the Harvest Season. All are available at www.enej.org.



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O WISDOM

O Sapientia

December 17

Antiphon

*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.*

Meditation

*O Wisdom, blessed knowledge, breath of life.
Grant us discernment as we journey on;
With joy we seek and serve you ceaselessly,
O Wisdom, blessed knowledge, breath of life.*

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel is with me now, beloved child of God.

*Becky Clark, Diocese of Olympia,
wrote the Meditation for each antiphon.*

A Reflection by Linda Watkins

We seek wisdom, all too often, in endless varieties of self-help books. We search Google in our quest for truth. Television personalities, politicians, and twenty-four-hour-a-day newscasts attempt to persuade us that they offer wisdom – neatly packaged as easy answers. We gorge ourselves on information, facts, and opinions yet we are never satisfied. Where, oh where, is the true wisdom we seek?

- Perhaps wisdom isn't always found among the rich and powerful, the educated, and the elite. Perhaps newscasts and social media will not give us what we seek. Maybe, just maybe, wisdom seeks us!
- She seeks us, calling to us from simple places: a cool breeze on a summer day, a humble act of selfless service. Wisdom calls to us in a child's question, a parent's tears. We can find the wisdom we seek written deep within the heart that merely says, "I believe" then foolishly follows that wherever it may lead.

Questions for Reflection:

Where are the places I am seeking wisdom and not finding it?

The Bible offers us many images of wisdom: i.e. the Book of Proverbs, the Psalms, the story of King Solomon. Picking an image that speaks to you, sit quietly with it, praying that God will open your heart to God's wisdom.

A reflection by Mike Maloney

This antiphon offers us hope that, even when we cannot always see it, there is an order to our world that comes from the very force which made it. Through our work, our prayers, and sometimes our patience and endurance, we embrace this divinely given hope and become part of the force that orders all things mightily.

O LORD

O Adonai

December 18

Antiphon

*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.*

Meditation

*O Lord the Sovereign of our hearts and minds.
 From evil you defend us and protect,
 Uphold us with your guidance and defense.
 O Lord the Sovereign of our hearts and minds.*

A Reflection from Dianne Aid, TSSF

The above antiphon sounds very nice. Too often however the word Lord leaves us with negative images of the boss, the bully and abusive partners. Plato described in his most well-known writing (The Cave) that what we see are only shadows of what is real. Our Lords become hunger, fear, greed and we individually and corporately create complex structures for us to fit into. We become angry, hostile subjects to selfish lords.

It is Advent, a season of quiet reflection. If we can take time to untangle from the greedy lords who are demanding our time and loyalty leaving us drained and helpless and learn the art of meditation to find our Real Lord that nurtures us, feeds us and loves us like a mother we can once again find the true Lord who leads us from despair to hope and the growing light of the Epiphany.

O ROOT OF JESSE

O Radix Jesse

December 19

Antiphon

*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.*

Meditation

*O Root of Jesse, family divine.
A sign for us your kingdom now is here;
Blessing all peoples with your love and grace.
O Root of Jesse, family divine.*

A Reflection from Dianne Aid, TSSF

The image of the Root of Jesse is a powerful one. The line of David, the line of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus carried with him a deep heritage rooted in God and brought new ways of prayer and action to humanity.

A friend and Capitan of an Aztec Dance and Drumming group gathers each week to teach and engage teenage and young adults, mostly immigrants in the ancient ceremonial dancing and drumming to connect them with their heritage. Ishmael says "You cannot know where you are going unless you know where you come from."

A tactic to destroy communities and their cultures leading to economic exploitation had been to wipe out the cultural memory. West Africans were kidnapped and separated so they were not with others who spoke a common language, therefore thrown into isolation. Many of their descendants now live in tough neighborhoods and are disproportionately incarcerated. Boarding Schools are a fresh memory for many First Nations peoples. Children were kidnapped or otherwise forced into boarding school with a specific goal to "kill the Indian in the child" therefore attempting to eradicate the past from memory.

The Root of Jesse is a strong one and cannot be eradicated. It is the root of our humanity. Every day we participate in a culture that is bent on weakening and destroying the root.

Where are we called as a church? We are surrounded with immigrants fleeing from dangers. Images we are given are images such as "Hiding in the shadows", we are told of the alarmingly high number of victims of human trafficking but we do not see them or think we do not - they are all around.

We are called to restore "The beloved Community", offer Sanctuary "a place of safety", bring communities together to share stories to facilitate the ability to rediscover the root, that spiritual strength of who God made each one of us to be and perpetually draw our strength from the one Root of Jesse, Jesus.

O KEY OF DAVID

O Clavis David

December 20

Antiphon

O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel;

you open and no one can shut;

you shut and no one can open:

*Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house,
those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*

Meditation

O Key of David, home of Israel.

From what confines unbind for ever more;

Safeguarded we now dwell within your peace.

O Key of David, home of Israel.

A Reflection from Amanda Goodwin

In reflecting on these words, "open wide our heavenly home," I feel impelled to describe an experience I had in the gardens of the Self Realization Fellowship headquarters in Los Angeles that I think of as a glimpse of heaven. We opened the car door, and I noticed it. The intense vibrancy of the colors, the loudness of the silence articulated with crisp bird sounds, leaf rustling sounds, wind sounds - each sound very distinctive. Walking into the garden of impossible plants, impossibly green and blooming, impossibly tropical in late winter. Each drop of sunlight glistening on the leaves a song, making harmonies with the wind. Dropping into meditation so easily, feeling like something was in the air, making us feel like this.

I have noticed that when I pray or meditate in the same place every day, that place becomes a magnet. If outside, the birds gather and sing there where I pray. The squirrels play. If inside, people and pets want to sit down and rest in that place.

When I think about the words 'make safe the way that leads on high,' I think about how hard it is for the homeless to ever have the peace and quiet necessary for meditation that we take for granted. There is so much noise pollution on the street, and the homeless have nowhere to go where they can close the door and be quiet and alone with themselves. To be always in public -

sirens and helicopters and beeping noises from buses and trucks, the constant dread of being uprooted by security guards or policemen - means any peace you may find is fleeting.

I experienced the discomfort of being outdoors in the city during a summertime community dinner we had in the labyrinth garden that was meant to be a special treat for our homeless dinner guests. My experience of that dinner was one of stress and fragmentation of my thoughts and attempts at listening to others. Conversation was made difficult by a helicopter hovering over our heads the whole time, and breathing was uncomfortable because of smoke from surrounding forest fires. I understood from the experience that God was giving us the opportunity to feel the longing for the indoors, for the ability to close the door and have peace, that our homeless brothers and sisters feel. The longing for a safe place where you can hear the voice of God.

The labyrinth garden, in general, is a favorite place for the homeless people of the neighborhood to come and rest, a place where many come to pray or meditate, reflect, and walk the labyrinth. The homeless are attracted to that place of prayer; they find peace there. There need to be more places of peacefulness where the homeless are invited and allowed to be. And I think it is possible that the places where the homeless are can be magnetized with peace when we pray in community there with them. I wonder how else we can create more places of silence and prayer for those who are trying to find a safe place to lift up their souls to God.

A Reflection from Michael Kendall

The Orthodox Icon of the Anastasis or the Harrowing of Hell shows Jesus standing on the Gates of Hell which he has opened and is pulling Adam and Eve our Mother and Father out of Hell. On the bottom of the image is a key. This the key of Isaiah 22:22 which is the Key of the Antiphon. Jesus, the Messiah, has used David's Key to unlock the Gates of Hell and free God's people.

This is the role of the Church, The body of Christ.

At a time when the forces of power subject people in this nation and all over the world to increased poverty, lack of health care, homelessness, deportation of immigrants, imprisonment of minorities, massive numbers of refugees, violence by war and lack of gun control, moral injury to the military, destruction of the environment, as well as racism and discrimination of all kinds is this not a hell on earth that cries out for liberation?

The Church is the body of Christ. We who have chosen Jesus and His gospel have a responsibility to join with our brothers and sisters of the earth to open the gates of this hell and bring about the healing of God's peace.

How? By witnessing to the Gospel in word and deed. Speak out, vote, participate in Church and civic programs, and engage in advocacy, community organizing to provide economic justice, racial reconciliation, sanctuary, food, housing, and environmental protection.

We the Gospel people know better and must act.

This is Advent a time of turning. Let us turn to the light and life of Christ.

Still we rise! In the name of Christ.

O DAYSPRING

O Oriens

December 21

Antiphon*O Morning Star,**splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness:**Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*

(Note: A literal translation of the Latin yields "O Rising Sun", but the poetic "O Morning Star" or "O Dayspring" is often preferred.)

Meditation*O Dayspring, thou Eternal Guiding Light.**Enlightened path of righteousness discerned,**Our darkness shed, our hope confirmed, new life!**O Dayspring, thou Eternal Guiding Light.****A Reflection by Beverly Hosea***

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness – on them light has shined. Isaiah 9:2

So we have the prophetic message more fully confirmed. You will do well to be attentive to this as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. 2 Peter 1:19

“It is I, Jesus, who sent my angel to you with this testimony for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.” Revelation 22:16

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Matthew 5:16

We have a source of energy for this planet which is abundant and free and getting more and more accessible by the day – sunlight. The energy from the star this planet revolves around warms us, provides light so that we can see and interact with our environment, and gives us edible energy through photosynthesis. Imagine what it would be like to rebuild Puerto Rico’s electrical power grid with solar panels – bypassing the fossil fuels with a non-polluting energy source.

The problem is we do not have the political and economic will to make this happen. When the ruling principles in business are concerned with profit making and satisfying investors rather than long term advances that would benefit everyone, i.e., others beyond the stockholders, then we are dwelling in darkness – spiritual darkness if not actual darkness like the homes and streets in Puerto Rico.

Jesus as the energy source, the Light of the world, came for those in the darkness of the prisons of their own making as well as the prisons of oppression. Luke 4:18 Jesus quoted Isaiah saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free."

For those who have "seen the light," who have experienced Jesus as a liberating force in their lives, recognize Jesus as the energy source in their lives generating light within them as well – light that both disperses the gloomy clouds of night and lights the way for others left in the dark.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee...

O KING OF NATIONS

O Rex Gentium

December 22

Antiphon

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

Meditation

*O King of nations, cornerstone, our peace.
In our discord your harmony maintained,
Your justice heals, no pain, no tears, just grace.
O King of nations, cornerstone, our peace.*

A reflection by Dianne Aid, TSSF

Despair: Jesus came into a world of strife, oppression and conflict imposed by the royalty.

The "Kings" of Nations today fight with each other for Earthly power at the cost of Creation and the safety of humanity. We are wondering daily with fear of nuclear war. This threat comes out of leaders posturing with each other as to who is stronger and has the ability to destroy, not only perceived enemies but global impact. Our nation is deeply divided based on support of our political leaders - not so much based in real issues but in rhetoric and personality.

Jesus is a much different model of "king": one that leads us from greed, selfishness and fear into being part of a life giving community (kingdom) of love. The Community of Jesus opens its arms widely to others, drawing compassion from us to nurture others, and freeing us to receive the compassion of others. Jesus is our spiritual king who lives within us and guides us to giving and receiving love and understanding this love is a love of abundance, not scarcity.

Question for Reflection

What am I (are we) hanging on to out of fear that letting go will endanger my/our comfort level?

Using a mantra or image that "Jesus is King" what steps can I/we take to live in the Community/Kingdom of Jesus?

O WITH US IS GOD

O Emmanuel

December 23

Antiphon

*O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver,
the hope of the nations and their Saviour:
Come and save us, O Lord our God.*

Meditation

*O come, O come, our hope, Immanuel.
Our Guide, Creator's sign, is manifest,
with strength and courage joyfully received.
O come, O come, our hope, Immanuel*

A Reflection from Abraham Ndungu

The first line of Antiphon O Emmanuel evokes the idea of God who is among his people and therefore feels with them (Emmanuel); God who is the king (a ruler who is, therefore, the protector and provider for his people); and God who is the promoter of justice through provision of the law.

The second and third line of the Antiphon is a follow-up of the first line. That God who is a just ruler and who dwells among his people is the hope for the world's salvation and can be called upon for help.

As much as Isaiah 7:14 may not have been talking about the birth of Jesus Christ per se, Matthew uses that scripture to point to the birth of Jesus, the savior of the world, indicating that God was among his people to bring healing, hope and shalom.

Advent is a period that reminds us that God not only came to live with people through the birth of Jesus Christ for purposes of bringing his shalom but that he is always present with us, always, and that his fullness of his presence is awaited in the eschaton.

A Reflection from Paige Foreman

A staple of Advent organ music is the first movement of French organist Marcel Dupre's *Symphonie-Passion*, "The World Awaiting the Savior." The movement begins with darkness and dissonance. The composer is constantly changing the meter of the plodding rhythm so listeners feel unsettled. The world without the savior is a world in discord.

Saint Augustine once wrote that humans desire because we're alive and we exist within time. The two things we desire, material things and the eternity of God, are constantly at odds with each other. This conflict can cause chaos.

In the middle of "The World Awaiting the Savior" is a peaceful chorale that is a resting place in the midst of the darkness and discord. This represents the birth of Jesus Christ and how He showed us a world of abundance and love.

Before we know it though, the peace of the chorale is just a memory and we are back in the chaos. The world is full of sin and despair before and after the savior is born—it is up to us to take what Jesus Christ taught us and change the world for the better. In the material world, we see only finite things and fail to remember the presence of God in our lives. Christ says in the Gospel of Matthew:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also," (Matthew 6:19-21, NRSV).

Today, the three richest Americans have more wealth than the bottom 50% of Americans, and this is happening while people are dying from lack of health care, poor nutrition, and drug overdoses. When we store up treasures on earth, the illusion of scarcity becomes a murderous ghost that takes the lives of vulnerable people. When we listen to the wisdom of Christ and share our material wealth, we store up treasures in heaven. The illusion of scarcity becomes less potent because we find the strength to love beyond fear.

Aspire to give more and love more this holiday season for when we do, God is with us.

MAGNIFICAT

Luke 1:46b-55

*"My soul magnifies the Lord,
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.
His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation.
He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly;
he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy,
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever."*

A Reflection from Dorothy Gibson

The idea of the angel visiting Mary has not been something I connected with until I realized how all of our lives are pregnant with possibility. Mary was chosen to take a tremendous risk and bear a child before her marriage was complete. And she took on this risk with the support, thankfully, of her betrothed.

And thank God she did!

How many of us reject the call of the Holy Spirit to take a risk? How many of us push through our fear and reticence and have enough faith to step into the possibilities that we are called to by God?

As we move through this season of Advent, take some time to reflect on the possibilities and listen.

Note: This reading and reflection from the Fourth Sunday of Advent are included because the seven O Antiphons lead us to the Magnificat.

INCARNATION

Advent represents a beginning of the cycle of incarnation. So, as we conclude the ancient cadence of the O Antiphons, Dianne presents a look forward.

Sparking a Grassroots Movement

I love to participate in Las Posadas (The Inns), a Mexican/Latin American tradition of depicting Mary and Joseph's journey to Bethlehem.

I can feel the experience of that journey to Bethlehem, crowds of people around, many of them travelers who were commanded to leave their lives to comply with the bureaucracy of responding to a government census. Crowds, noise, tiredness were definitely part of the scene.

We know the story, Joseph desperately begging for a place to sleep, and for Mary to be comfortable during the imminent birth of her child. "No room here", "Move on", "We have no place for people like you".

It is no surprise that the faith-based immigrants' rights movements of today uses the structure of Las Posadas as a message of vigils to bring about hospitality, and justice for immigration reform.

The story of Jesus birth I was presented with as a child is very much alive in the commercialization of Christmas, but it is very different from what I reflect on now, and what motivates my actions. The blond haired, blue eyed angels flitting around in prom dresses and the docile equally blond haired blue eyed little shepherd boys are pretty far-fetched. "FEAR NOT" say the angels, implying they had to assure the listeners that it was safe to listen to them. The shepherds were workers, wage earners, and most likely low wage earners. I will bet they were not unionized!

The angels directed the shepherds to go to Bethlehem to find this very special baby who had been born. Some left the fields, traveling from the rural countryside into this urban scene of confusion, trying to find a needle in a haystack. They would have sought out people they felt comfortable asking for directions, other workers, stable workers, housekeepers for the inns, etc. These were the people who would have known first.

The shepherds did find the baby in the stable, a relatively quiet place away from the noise, confusion and hubbub of the town, with only the company of the servant animals, and those working around the stable they discovered the baby, being cared for by Mary and Joseph, in the simplicity of the night. "Come to the Quiet", the title of a song by singer and Franciscan, John Michael-Talbot describes for me what was happening.

The shepherds will go back to their fields, carrying with them the marvelous story in the oral tradition, which is truth for communities from the dawning of language. We don't really know if the Magi encountered the shepherds at the time they arrived bearing gifts of gold and precious herbs. We do understand they "emptied their hands" of their riches, the shepherds had come

empty handed, but, it did not matter. We honor both shepherds and Magi in our Christmas tradition.

Not much information is given to us about Jesus childhood formative years, but certainly his parents would have talked with him about his birth instilling in him passion and respect for the poor and those not so poor. His birth brought people from all walks of life together. It is the basis for much of the Gospel tradition, The Song of Mary, The Laborers in the Vineyard, The Fish and the Loaves. We are called to a life which offers sustainability to all regardless of origin, to break down the barriers that have created classism, racism and economic oppression.

Our Presiding Bishop is using the concept of The Beloved Community to encompass his call for renewal of the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement at the grass roots level (<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/racial-reconciliation>). The Episcopal Networks Collaborative (UBE, ENEJ, EpEN) supports this movement and is part of it. We are especially concerned with reforming systems which maintain the divisions according to race, gender, class, and all the other isms used to marginalize, exclude and oppress different groups of people.

I wish you all peace as we move into the cycle of Incarnation. Where is the Star leading you?

**Dianne Aid, TSSF
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