

# Explanation of Advent's "O Antiphons"

as found in *The Saint Jean de Brébeuf Hymnal*

<https://ccwatershed.org/hymn>

## 652 Veni Veni Emmanuel (The "O" Antiphons)

*Old Testament titles for the Messiah*

(23 DECEMBER)  
O Emmanuel, our King and our Law-Giver, the Expectation and the Savior of Nations! come to our Salvation, O Lord our God.

○ EMMÁNUEL,  
Rex et légifer noster, expectatio  
géntium, et salvátor eárum:  
veni ad salvándum nos  
Dómine Deus noster.

(22 DECEMBER)  
O King of the Gentiles, the Desired of Nations, the Corner Stone that unitest both in one! come, to the Salvation of Man, whom thou hast fram'd of Earth.  
[i.e. God made man from slime of the earth]

○ REX GÉNTIUM,  
et desiderátus eárum,  
lapisque anguláris, qui facis  
útraque unum: veni, et salva hóminem,  
quem de limo formásti.

(21 DECEMBER)  
O Orient ("DAWN"), the Splendor of Eternal Light, and Son of Justice! come and enlighten those that sit in the Dark, and in the Shades of Death.

○ ÓRIENS,  
splendor lucis aetérnae,  
et sol justítiae: veni,  
et illúmina sedéntes in ténebris,  
et umbra mortis.

O Key of David, (20 DECEMBER)  
and Scepter of the House of Israel! who openest, and no one shuts, shuttest, and no one opens; come and bring forth from their Prisons, those that are in Chains, sitting in the Dark, and in the Shades of Death.

○ CLAVIS DAVID,  
et sceptrum domus Israëli; qui áperis, et  
nemo claudit; claudis, et nemo áperit:  
veni, et edue vinc-tum de domo cárceris,  
sedéntem in ténebris, et umbra mortis.

(19 DECEMBER)  
O Root of Jesse! who standest for a Sign to Nations, before whom Kings shall restrain their Mouths: Thou, whom the Gentiles shall Address, come to our Deliverance and now delay no more.

○ RADIX JESSE,  
qui stas in signum populórum,  
super quem continébunt reges os suum,  
quem Gentes deprecabúntur: veni  
ad liberándum nos, jam noli tardáre.

(18 DECEMBER)  
O Adonai ("LORD"), and Leader of the House of Israel! who appeared'st to Moses in the Flaming Bush, and gavest to him the Law in Sinai, come and redeem us with thy strong Arm.

○ ADONÁI,  
et Dux domus Israëli, qui Móysi  
in igne flammae rubi apparuísti,  
et ei in Sina legem dedísti: veni  
ad rediméndum nos in bráchio exténto.

(17 DECEMBER)  
O Wisdom! who earnest forth from the Mouth of the Most High; powerfully extending from End to End, and sweetly disposing all Things; come, and instruct us in the Ways of Prudence.

○ SAPIÉNTIA,  
quae ex ore Altíssimi prodísti,  
attingens a fine usque ad finem,  
fórtiter suávitèr disponénsque ómnia:  
veni ad docéndum nos viam prudéntiae.

## Veni Veni Emmanuel (The "O" Antiphons) 653

*Trns: Msgr. Ronald A. Knox (d. 1957)*

○ COME, O come, Emmanuel,  
And ransom captive Israel,  
That mourns in lonely exile here,  
Until the Son of God appear.

*R. Rejoice, rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

○ COME, of Gentile hearts the King,  
A world that needs thee ransoming,  
And save thy servants, who confess  
With humbled hearts their faithlessness. R.

○ COME, thou Daystar seen on high,  
With healing for our hearts draw nigh;  
Do thou the mists of night dispel,  
And death's foreboding darkness quell. R.

○ COME, thou Key of David's store,  
Unlock the heav'nly gates once more;  
Safe journey to thy courts bestow,  
And shut the way that leads below. R.

○ COME, thou Rod of Jesse, free  
Thine own from Satan's tyranny;  
From depths of hell thy people save,  
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave. R.

○ COME, thou everlasting Lord,  
Who once by Israel's host adored  
Thy ten commandments madest known,  
In majesty of glory shown. R.

○ COME, thou Wisdom whose decree  
Doth govern all things peacefully;  
The way of prudence here below  
And life hereafter deign to show. R.

Final Verses: Richard Lloyd (1993) #234; Noel Rawsthorne (2011) #374.

Veni Veni Emmanuel (Latin) is a paraphrase of the "O Antiphons" created in 1710 by German Jesuits. The English translation is based on that of Msgr. Ronald Knox, as the famous 1851 translation by John Mason Neale (originally "Draw nigh, draw nigh, Emmanuel") omits two verses. The traditional melody dates from the 15th century. The literal translation is historical; cf. *Primer, or Office of the B. Virgin Mary* (Thomas Meighan, 1732) p. 426.

88 88 R

Tune:  
VENI VENI EMMANUEL

The deeply scriptural "O Antiphons" are quite ancient; e.g. Boethius (d. 525 AD) refers to them. Liturgically, they are used as the Magnificat antiphons for Vespers during the final days of Advent, and form an Advent acrostic—ERO CRAS—which means: "I will be there tomorrow." Because of the acrostic, they are normally sung in reverse: Emmanuel ("God with us"); Rex ("King of the Gentiles"); Oriens ("Sunrise"); Clavis ("Key of David"); Radix ("Root of Jesse"); Adonai (Hebrew substitute for ineffable name of YHWH—"Lord"); Sapiencia ("Wisdom").

*The Father John Brébeuf Hymnal* "has no parallel and not even any close competitor."

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— Author for the *Church Music Association of America* weblog • 10 June 2022