



Invest time each week to  
expand your vocabulary and  
deepen your faith.

15 December 2024

## WORD OF THE WEEK

### O Antiphons lō 'an-tə-fəns\

From Greek meaning “sounding against,” seven short scripture verses, sung or chanted at Vespers, often in divided choirs, during the week before Christmas, December 17 to 23. Each Antiphon invokes Christ by means of an Old Testament symbol: O Wisdom, O Sacred Lord, O Flower of Jesse’s Stem, O Key of David, O Radiant Dawn, O King of All Nations, and O Emmanuel.

*Pronunciation:* <https://tinyurl.com/Take5-o-antiphons>

### CONTEXT

If we rest each evening with the **O Antiphons**, . . . Advent will be for us once again a time of God’s great love and hope.  
—*Madeleine L’Engle*

The **O Antiphons** proclaim the coming Christ as the fulfillment not only of Old Testament hopes, but our present desires as well.  
—*Grace Hetzel*

### WHY IT MATTERS

It’s tempting to treat the two Testaments of our Bible as the “before” and “after” of religious understanding for Christianity. In the contemplation of the great **O Antiphons**, we discover that the divine revelation we recognize as Jesus has been within the story of God’s people from the beginning.

From *Learning from the O Antiphons* by C.C. Pecknold: The **O Antiphons** were certainly in regular use by the time of Charlemagne in the eighth century. “They prepare us for the great Vigil of Christmas, uniting Israel’s hopes and the desire of nations as a kind of prophetic *summa* in praise of divine providence. In the heart of winter’s darkness, the **O Antiphons** call us to worship Jesus Christ as the center of salvation history.”

### RELATED WORDS

Antiphon | Liturgy of the Hours | Magnificat | Vespers

## QUESTION OF THE WEEK

### What are the O Antiphons?

The **O Antiphons** (also known as the Great Advent Antiphons or Great Os) are sung verses used in evening prayer during the last seven days of Advent (December 17-23) at the beginning and end of the Magnificat, a hymn of praise spoken by Mary. Rendered in order, in Latin and English, the **O Antiphons** are: *O Sapientia* (O Wisdom), *O Adonai* (O Lord), *O Radix Jesse* (O Root of Jesse), *O Clavis Davidica* (O Key of David), *O Oriens* (O Radiant Dawn), *O Rex Gentium* (O King of Nations), and *O Emmanuel* (O God-with-us). As an acrostic, the Latin version reads SARCORE, reversed as *ero cras* (“I will be tomorrow”). Since the Antiphons are traditionally chanted December 17-23, Jesus is literally born “tomorrow” at the chant’s conclusion. The **O Antiphons** have been around at least since the eighth century, when monks would sing them. Even if you don’t pray the Liturgy of the Hours, these Antiphons may sound familiar. This is because they were incorporated into one of the best-known hymns of the Advent season: “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.”

—*Alice Camille, from Questions Catholics Ask* <http://tinyurl.com/QCA-O-antiphons>

## REFLECTION OF THE WEEK

TUESDAY OF THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT (DECEMBER 17)

### Grow in wisdom

Today the church begins to sing the **O Antiphons** to accompany the Advent evening prayer of Mary’s Magnificat. These short, sung phrases remind us of our need for salvation and our desire to embody the divine characteristics of our Savior.

READINGS: Genesis 49:2, 8-10; Matthew 1:1-17 (193 <https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/121724.cfm>). “*O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love: come to teach us the path of knowledge!*”

### FAITH IN ACTION

Today we pray for knowledge. This is not the knowledge that wins arguments around the dinner table, but the knowledge that shines a light on who we are, where we came from, and what we are called to do as followers of Christ.