

You are invited to reflect, pray, and meditate after the service in the sanctuary.

**"The Advent mystery is the beginning of the end
of all in us that is not yet Christ."**

Thomas Merton

(Seasons of Celebration: Meditations on the Cycle of Liturgical Feasts)

Servants of the Word

Preacher: Professor Jeff Oswald

Reader: Seminarian Paul Flo

Organist: Director of Music Arts Jim Marriott

Notes on the Service

This message takes its inspiration from Dr. Robert Bertram's "The Great O Antiphons of Advent," published in *RESOURCES for Youth Ministry* 1 (January—April 1969). Copyright © 1969 The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It was first introduced to me by Pastor Ken Mangelsdorf, then pastor of St. Peter Lutheran Church, Mishawaka, Indiana.

The concluding collect is freely adapted from Eric Milner-White's "Advent," page 16 in *My God My Glory* (London: Triangle, 1994).

Dr. Jeffrey A. Oswald
Concordia Seminary, Saint Louis
Advent ANNO DOMINI 2018



- ❶ **S**apientia, quæ ex ore Altissimi prodisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem fortiter, suaviterque disponens omnia: veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiæ.
- ❷ **A**donai, et dur domus Israel, qui Moysi in igne flammæ rubi apparuisti, et ei in Sina legem dedisti: veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.
- ❸ **R**adix Jesse, qui stas in signum populorum, super quem continebunt reges os suum, quem gentes deprecabuntur: veni ad liberandum nos, jam noli tardare.
- ❹ **C**lavis David, et sceptrum domus Israël qui aperis, et nemo claudit, claudis, et nemo aperit: veni, et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris, et umbra mortis.
- ❺ **O**riens, splendor lucis æternæ et sol justitiæ: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris, et umbra mortis.
- ❻ **R**ex gentium, et desideratus earum, lapisque angularis, qui facis utraque unum: veni, et salva hominem quem de limo formasti.
- ❼ **E**manuel, Rex et legifer noster, expectatio gentium, et Salvator earum: veni ad salvandum nos, Domine, Deus noster.

The Great O Antiphons

Chapel of Saints Timothy & Titus, Concordia Seminary

11 December A.D. 2018

“Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” Matthew 1:23

May grace and peace be yours in abundance
in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. 2 Peter 1:2

THE PREACHER:

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

We are Advent People. We watch. We wait. We hope for what we do not see. But the nights of our Advent are long, and the nights of our Advent are cold, and dark. We grow weary and lose hope. Our hearts grow cold. And, in the end, the darkness seeps into our souls.

For generation after generation, the Advent people of God have encountered these problems. Those who have gone before us, however, found a way to “hold fast to the hope” that they confessed. They found a way to renew their joy and to rekindle their devotion. They simply took these problems to the Lord in prayer.

During the last week of their annual celebration of Advent, when they gathered for evening prayer, our fathers and mothers in the Faith voiced together their Advent longing. The words they used, these antiphons, were said before and after their singing of the Magnificat—Mary’s Advent song of joyous hopefulness. Beginning with the seventeenth of December, each night had its own special antiphon. These prayers reminded the people of God that Emmanuel would indeed come again and save them. In this promise, they found strength.

Today, we will use these prayers, and the hymn they inspired, to express our own fervent Advent longing. May this good news of Emmanuel prepare our hearts to welcome Him aright when He comes!

THE READER:

O Lord, our years grow long and our time short: let the Advent cries of Your prophets rouse us from our heavy-lidded hearing of Your Word. Let us hear Your Word today and repent, bowing heads and hearts before You. Let us do Your Word today, amending our lives, not waiting for a tomorrow that may not come. Let us bring an end now to this foolish love of our own mischief; let us abandon without a backward glance the unfruitful works of darkness. Inspire us with a new watchfulness to seize every opportunity for good and to put on at last the whole armor of light. Reckon us among that great throng who work for their Lord, loins girded, lamps burning, until the night passes and the true Light shines. Let us sing the new song, following You, Good Shepherd and Lamb of God, wherever You go, loving wherever You love, doing whatever You ask, until the perfect day dawns and night is no more.

THE PEOPLE: **Amen.**

THE READER:

The Almighty God bless us with His grace; + Christ give us the joys of everlasting life; and to the fellowship of the citizens above may the King of Angels bring us all.

THE PEOPLE: **Amen.**

THE PREACHER:

Brothers and Sisters, I ask you now to turn back with me for a moment to the cover, for I want to share with you a message of hope and joy hidden within the prayers we have just prayed together again. On the cover you will see these antiphons in their original Latin form. You can see that each antiphon begins with the word *O*. For that reason, they are called the “Great O Antiphons.” But the second word is really the more important. The second word of each prayer is a title for the coming Savior: Wisdom, Adonai, Root of Jesse, Key of David, Dayspring, King of Nations, and Emmanuel.

But the antiphons don’t express only our Advent supplication, they also express Emmanuel’s response—if you know where to look for it. If you read the purple letters backwards from the last prayer to the first, they read “E-R-O C-R-A-S.” The final prayer, the one that begins “O Emmanuel,” will be prayed on the twenty-third of December. The following evening will be Christmas Eve, the celebration of Emmanuel’s birth. So then, if on December 23, you look back at all of the prayers you have said this week and recall all the promises you have heard this week, you will discover the hidden message I spoke of—Emmanuel’s response to the Advent longing of His people. In Latin, *ero cras* means “Tomorrow, I will be there!”

Rejoice! Emmanuel has heard your prayers. He promises: “Tomorrow, I will be there!”



December 17



THE READER:

O Wisdom, proceeding from the mouth of the Most High, pervading and permeating all creation, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of understanding.

THE PREACHER:

Is there anyone here this morning who feels that his or her life is *not* “mightily and sweetly ordered”? Is there anyone here who suddenly finds himself saying, “All I have are answers I can’t trust to questions I don’t understand!”? Is there anyone here who is searching for a wisdom that will not turn out, in the end, to be vanity, or deception, or just more human folly? Then we say to that person, “Brother, Sister, take heart! The Wisdom from above now comes down to you. He comes from highest Heaven to your world, down to the manger, down to the cross. Emmanuel knows all things, and He knows you. He comes to teach you God’s foolishness, which is ‘the way of wisdom.’ He is God-with-us and He is with you, too. So rejoice and sing:”

THE PEOPLE:

*O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
Who ord’rest all things mightily;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And teach us in her ways to go.*

*Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

December 18



THE READER:

O Adonai, and Ruler of the House of Israel, Who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and gave him the Law on Sinai: Come and with an outstretched arm redeem us.

THE PREACHER:

Is there anyone here this morning who feels that he or she is still trapped in the ancient bondage in Egypt? Is there anyone here who feels that she is a slave to sin, or guilt, or death? That the promise of a new ruler and a new law is only the promise of new oppression? Who fears that no one can guide him through the wilderness to the Promised Land of Freedom? Then we say to that person, "Brother, Sister, take heart! 'When the fullness of time had come, God came, born of a woman, born under the law to redeem those who are under the law.' His name is Emmanuel. He is God-with-us and He is with you, too. So rejoice and sing:"

THE PEOPLE:

O come, o come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai's height
In ancient times didst give the Law
In cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

December 23



THE READER:

O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Desire of All Nations and their Savior: Come and save us, O Lord our God.

THE PREACHER:

Is there anyone here this morning whose life has left him afraid to hope, afraid to dream, afraid to wish for anything? Is there anyone here whose Christmas list is empty because she no longer knows what to ask for, because she no longer knows what could bring meaning and purpose, hope and joy, peace and love? Is there anyone here this morning who longs to know a life that is not just a slow dying? Who yearns for the desire of every nation--the desire of his own heart? Then we say to that person, "Brother, Sister, take heart! Emmanuel comes. In His presence are joy, and peace, and life abundant. Because He knew how to die, He can teach you how to live. The gift He brings is far better than anything you could ask for, dream for, or even imagine. Behold! The gift He gives you is Himself. He is God-with-us and He is with you, too. So rejoice and sing:"

THE PEOPLE:

O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

December 22



THE READER:

O King of the Nations, the Ruler they long for, the Cornerstone uniting all people: Come and save mankind whom You formed out of clay.

THE PREACHER:

Is there anyone here this morning who feels that his life is all out of whack, no longer on the square, where not one brick of his life-house lines up with another? Who feels that the one desire of her heart recedes farther into the distance with each passing year? Who longs for something or someone that can bring about unity at work, at home, at church, among the nations, within her heart? Who feels that his life is clay and his life is crumbling? Then we say to that person, "Brother, Sister, take heart! The rejected stone has become the Cornerstone. In knowing and trusting Him you will find singleness of heart and be united with all your brothers and sisters in a single Desire. He is Emmanuel. He is God-with-us and He is with you, too. So rejoice and sing:"

THE PEOPLE:

O come, Desire of nations, bind
In one the hearts of all mankind;
Bid Thou our sad divisions cease,
And be Thyself our King of Peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

December 19



THE READER:

O Root of Jesse, standing as an ensign before the peoples, before Whom all kings are mute, to Whom the nations will do homage: Come to deliver us, and delay not.

THE PREACHER:

Is there anyone here this morning who feels that she simply has no life left in her? Is there anyone here who feels that he is "used up" and "burnt out"--*exhausted*? And not only that, he fears that the whole people of God is nothing but "dead wood"? Then we say to that person, "Brother, Sister, take heart! Look! From the dead stump of our failure, God raises up a new and living sprout. He comes to bring you life. His name is Emmanuel. He is God-with-us and He is with you, too. So rejoice and sing:"

THE PEOPLE:

O come, Thou Branch of Jesse's tree,
Free them from Satan's tyranny
That trust Thy mighty pow'r to save,
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

December 20



THE READER:

O Key of David and Scepter of the House of Israel, You open and no one can close, You close and no one can open: Come and rescue the prisoners who are in darkness and the shadow of death.

THE PREACHER:

Is there anyone here this morning who feels that he has been locked out of the House of Life, so that he cannot enter the peace and joy within? Is every door of opportunity locked tight against her so that she cannot open it—even the door to God? Then we say to that person, “Brother, Sister, take heart! Look! Here is the Key who opens His heavenly home to you. Here is the Door, enter through Him and be saved! His name is Emmanuel. He is God-with-us and He is with you, too. So rejoice and sing:”

THE PEOPLE:

O 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.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!

December 21



THE READER:

O Dayspring, Splendor of Light Everlasting and Sun of Righteousness: Come and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

THE PREACHER:

Is there anyone here this morning who thought he could hide his wickedness in the darkness but now realizes that the darkness possesses him? And even though she once hated the Light, she now knows that only the Light can save her from this place of weeping and gnashing of teeth? Then we say to that person, “Brother, Sister, take heart! The Sun of righteousness shines in the darkness, and the darkness cannot master Him. He comes to give you righteousness. In Him, you will shine like the stars. His name is Emmanuel. He is God-with-us and He is with you, too. So rejoice and sing:”

THE PEOPLE:

O come, Thou Dayspring from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death’s dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice!
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!