

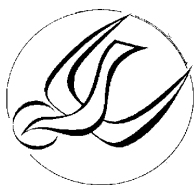
B.A.S.I.C.

Brothers And Sisters In Christ

The Seven Prayers of Advent

In the ancient church there were seven special prayers which were used for one week proceeding Christmas, from Dec. 17 – 23. Each of these seven prayers begins with a different name from Christ. Because they all begin with an “O”, they are often referred to as the seven “O” Antiphons. These antiphons are at least as old as 480 ad. In the 12th century they were set to music and finally in the 19th century John Neale translated this hymn into the extremely popular “Oh Come, Oh come Emmanuel”. These prayers are well suited to Advent preparations since they focus on repentance and the coming Christ. In this series I will use Neale’s translations of the prayers but place them in their original order.

O Sapientia [O Wisdom]



The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, The Spirit of counsel and might, The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. Isaiah 11:2

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high,
And order all things, far and nigh;
To us the path of knowledge show,
And cause us in her ways to go.

The personification of wisdom is not unique to the Bible, it is a common theme in much of the world’s literature. But in Christ alone does it cease being merely a literary device and find life and breath and fulfillment. It is fitting that these prayers and all prayers begin with asking for wisdom from the only source of wisdom. Our society is obsessed with individualism, where every man is encouraged to believe that truth comes only from his own mind, that the only measurement of good and truth is found within ourselves. And even within our own synod

and churches how often hasn’t arrogant pride in my own wisdom caused discord and strife. We must begin here to crush our pride, dismiss our own opinions, repent of our sins, and trust only in Christ’s wisdom. We pray that the Wisdom, which is Christ, would come to us and banish arrogant human wisdom.

O come Lord Jesus and grant us your truth, yours alone.

O Adonai [O Lord]

But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, And decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Isaiah 11:4



Oh, come, oh, come, great Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes on Sinai’s height
In Ancient times once gave the law
In cloud, and majesty and awe.

Here we see Christ coming as our Lord and master, the law giver. Not only do we see it, but we are praying for it.

Isaiah 11:4 is fulfilled when Christ came and gave His word, and in the giving of that Word and through its power spread His kingdom on the Earth. With the law the Lord strikes down the wicked in their arrogance and reduces all their pride, so that as Paul proclaims, “every mouth may be stopped.”

Indeed we are asking that the Lord may do this very thing to us. For we can hardly escape when the Lord gives His law, but even though the Israelites trem-

When we speak of a branch from the root of Jesse we are reminded that God kept his promise when it seemed most unlikely, even impossible that He would.



bled in fear at the foot of Mount Sinai, it is only under the awesome fear of His holy law that we learn the truth of our own wickedness, and understand the true worth and glory of the Gospel. What a wonderful thing that every verse of this hymn ends. "Rejoice, Rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel."

So yes come O Lord and teach us your law, that we may learn not to trust in ourselves, but in deepest humility repent and trust fully in thy gracious and saving name.

O Radix Jesse [O Rod of Jesse]

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch shall grow out of his roots. Isaiah 11:1

Oh, come, strong branch of Jesse, free
Thine own from Satans tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save
And give them vict'ry o'er the grave.

When we speak of a branch from the root of Jesse we are reminded that God kept his promise when it seemed most unlikely, even impossible that He would. The nation of Israel had been destroyed. The Romans ruled the world, what hope could there possibly be that a Son of David would once again arise to rule? There was no strength in Israel that could oppose the Romans. And yet God brought forth His promised Son.

Certainly there is much in our day which is comparable. What hope is there for the truth of God's Word to remain to future generations? What hope is there that anyone will actually listen to the Word which we keep preaching? In these things we can trust Christ's promise.

But far more importantly is that seemingly useless hope which the verse itself mentions, that those bound by Satan's tyranny, those languishing in the depths of hell, may receive victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. These things are once again not literary devices. In a very real way many Christians are caught in sin and after dealing with these same sins year after year after year, we may have to admit with David and Luther, "fast bound in Satan's chains I lie, death brooded darkly over me." Yet even here completely surrounded by death, by my own sin,

Christ comes to bring forth life from death, to fulfill His promise.

Come O Lord and release me from these chains of darkness that I may live to serve You.

O Clavis David [O Key of David]

The key of the house of David I will lay on his shoulder; So he shall open, and no one shall shut; And he shall shut, and no one shall open. Isaiah 22:22



Oh, come, Thou Key of David, come
And open wide our heavenly home:
Make safe the way that leads on high
And close the path to misery.

Since David's throne, is often the prophetic throne of Christ, and David's kingdom is a picture of Christ's, it makes sense that also the keys of the kingdom of heaven, which Christ would not only use but give to His Church, are also here foretold with the symbolic reference to David.

Jesus Himself almost perfectly quotes this verse in Revelation 3:8 when speaking to the church in Philadelphia. And Jesus fulfills this prophecy numerous times in His ministry, most notably when He forgives the sins of the lame man. But ultimately Jesus fulfilled this prophecy not just in the use of the Keys, but in His own body.

You will notice that both the passage and the prayer do not address Christ as He who merely possess or uses the key, but who is Himself in His body the Key. Thus when He is giving the keys to the His church, He is once again and in one more way giving himself to the Church. Thus we pray that Christ would remind us that He is the key to all things. That He is the center of our worship and life. That it is only when Christ and His cross remains our focus that anything is accomplished in our world for His kingdom. We ask His forgiveness for every time we have become distracted, and that He in His mercy would realign us, and always keep the cross central in our lives and preaching.

Lord Jesus Christ open to us the gates of thy kingdom through the preaching of thy gospel.

O Oriens [O Radiant Dawn]



The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. Isaiah 9:2

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.

I grew up with a paper route. I know what it is like to get up at five in the morning, to trudge through thick snow, in blackest night, in zero degree weather. Nothing in my life has ever been so amazing so beautiful as finally seeing the sun, feeling just the slightest bit of heat, after two and a half or three hours in the snow and ice and darkness. This image may sometimes seem a bit over used, but there is good reason for it.

In this prayer we remind ourselves that the night is indeed far spent, but the day is near at hand. We have been so long in the night of this world, that we often forget what our goal is, what our hope is, and what awaits us at the end of our journey. We might get frustrated because we seem to accomplish so little on this earth. We often feel the need to "make something of our lives" and dedicating our lives to the task of God's kingdom seldom seems to qualify.

Here we pray the Lord would remove the darkness from our sight, turn our eyes away from the evil and materialism of this world and refocus us once again on that glorious dawn, that wondrous place which is to come.

Lord Jesus Christ open though my heart, that I may no longer be blinded by sin and greed and materialism, but instead may find my joy in the light of your salvation.

O Rex Gentium [O King of Gentiles]

He shall judge between the nations, And rebuke many people; They shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruning hooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war anymore. Isaiah 2:4



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

This is of course normally the first verse and the most popular, and rightly so as it is the heart of all the other prayers. Yet, for that very reason it was the last of the prayers, in order to sum up in

O come desire of nations, bind
All peoples in one heart and mind;
Bid envy, strife, and quarrels cease;
Fill the whole world with heaven's peace.

The ultimate hopes and dreams of so many: that we might find peace on this earth. How many Miss America contestants wish for it? How many politicians promise it? Yet Christ gives it.

Certainly not in the way that men want it or expect. Just as Christ himself does not come in the way or means that men want or expect. But nevertheless come He did and so does His peace, not in the halls of the UN, or the lengthy forms of bureaucrats, and definitely not in the might of our military. But in the hearts of those who hear His word.

All men who belong to Christ are united and at peace with one another, even though the nations rage and clash their teeth. Thus here we pray exactly what we always pray in the second petition, "thy kingdom come."

That is to say we pray that through the preaching of His word, His kingdom would grow and prosper and His peace would enter the hearts of many. That He would forgive us when we ourselves fail to stand firm upon His word, and fail to share His peace with our neighbors. And finally that in the end he would make a final end to all quarrel and strife when He creates a new heaven and a new earth were peace and righteousness will reign.

Lord Jesus come in thy word to spread thy Holy Kingdom.

O Emmanuel [God with us]

Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14

**Lord Jesus Christ
open though my
heart, that I may
no longer be
blinded by sin
and greed and
materialism, but
instead may find
my joy in the
light of your sal-
vation.**

grand finale all the hopes and dreams of God's people, trapped beneath the weight of sin and death, living in darkness and chaos.

One can almost sense the pain, the urgency, the hope, the wonder in these words. Will He really do it? Will He really give up all and come to earth as one of us for our sakes bringing salvation?

Will He really do it for me? They say the first step is admitting you have a problem, but often the hardest part is finding someone willing and able to help. Will He really come to my heart? Does He really live there now? With all my sin, with all my pride, with all my problems?

This is what makes Christmas relevant. It isn't the celebration of the Christ who conquered darkness. It is the pleading with Christ and the promise for Christ to come now, to live with us now, to dispel darkness now. That Christ would come now here to those who moan in loneliness and despair.

And the resounding answer, from all the prophets, all the apostles, all the evangelist, from Christ himself, the jubilant answer of Christmas, is YES, He has come and will come in His grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

O Come Emmanuel, and make here your home.

-Missionary Matthew Ude