



Settimo Cielo



di Sandro Magister

17 dic

Advent in Music. Seven Antiphons, All Worth Discovering Again



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From today, December 17, until the day before Christmas Eve, at the Magnificat during vespers in the Roman rite, seven antiphons are sung, one per day, all of them beginning with an invocation to Jesus, although he is never called by name.

The antiphons are very old, going back to the time of Pope Gregory the Great, around the year 600.

At the beginning of each antiphon, in order, Jesus is invoked as Wisdom, Lord, Root, Key, Star, King, Emmanuel. In Latin: Sapientia, Adonai, Radix, Clavis, Oriens, Rex, Emmanuel.

Read starting from the last, the Latin initials of these words form an acrostic: "ERO CRAS," meaning: "I will be [there] tomorrow." It is the proclamation of the Lord who comes. The last antiphon, which completes the acrostic, is sung on December 23, and the following day, with first vespers, the feast of the Nativity begins.

The antiphons are inspired by the texts of the Old Testament proclaiming the Messiah. But with a special feature: the last three antiphons include some expressions that can be explained only in the light of the New Testament.

The antiphon "O Oriens" for December 21 includes a clear reference to the Canticle of Zechariah in Chapter 1 of the Gospel of Luke, the "Benedictus": "The daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those who sit in darkness and death's shadow."

The antiphon "O Rex" for December 22 includes a reference to a passage from the hymn to Jesus in Chapter 2 of the letter of Paul to the Ephesians: "That he might create in himself one new person in place of the two [Jews and pagans]."

The antiphon "O Emmanuel" for December 23, finally, concludes with the invocation "Dominus Deus noster": an exclusively Christian invocation, because only the followers of Jesus recognize the Emmanuel as the Lord their God.

Here, then, are the complete texts of the seven antiphons, in Latin and in English, with in parentheses the main references to the Old and New Testament:

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I – December 17

O SAPIENTIA, quae ex ore Altissimi prodisti,
attingens a fine usque ad finem fortiter suaviterque disponens omnia:
veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.

O Wisdom, who come from the mouth of the Most High (Sirach 24:5), you extend to the ends of the earth, and order all things with power and sweetness (Wisdom 8:1): come and teach us the way of wisdom (Proverbs 9:6).

II – December 18

O ADONAI, dux domus Israel,
qui Moysi in igne flammae rubi apparuisti, et in Sina legem dedisti:
veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extenso.

O Lord (Exodus 6:2, Vulgate), leader of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush (Exodus 3:2) and on Mount Sinai gave him the law (Exodus 20): come and free us with your powerful arm (Exodus 15:12-13).

III – December 19

O RADIX Iesse, qui stas in signum populorum,
super quem continebunt reges os suum, quem gentes deprecabuntur:
veni ad liberandum nos, iam noli tardare.

O Root of Jesse, who stand as a sign for the peoples (Isaiah 11:10), the kings of the earth are silent before you (Isaiah 52:15) and the nations invoke you: come to free us, do not delay (Habakkuk 2:3).

IV – December 20

O CLAVIS David et sceptrum domus Israel,
qui aperis, et nemo claudit; claudis, et nemo aperit:
veni et educ vincitum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

O Key of David (Isaiah 22:23), scepter of the house of Israel (Genesis 49:10), who open and no one may shut; who shut and no one may open: come, free from prison captive man, who lies in darkness and the shadow of death (Psalm 107: 10, 14).

V – December 21

O ORIENS, splendor lucis aeternae et sol iustitiae:
veni et illumina sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis.

O Star who rises (Zechariah 3:8; Jeremiah 23:5), splendor of the eternal light (Wisdom 7:26) and sun of justice (Malachi 3:20): come and enlighten those who lie in darkness and the shadow of death (Isaiah 9:1; Luke 1:79).

VI – December 22

O REX gentium et desideratus earum,
lapis angularis qui facis utraque unum:
veni et salva hominem quem de limo formasti.

O King of the nations (Jeremiah 10:7) and their desire (Haggai 2:7), cornerstone (Isaiah 28:16), who reunite Jews and pagans into one (Ephesians 2:14): come and save the man whom you formed from the earth (Genesis 2:7).

VII – December 23

O EMMANUEL, rex et legifer noster,
expectatio gentium et salvator earum:
veni ad salvandum nos, Dominus Deus noster.

O Emmanuel (Isaiah 7:14), our king and lawgiver (Isaiah 33:22), hope and salvation of the peoples (Genesis 49:10; John 4:42): come to save us, O Lord our God (Isaiah 37:20).

Condividi:



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