

December 21, 2025



O RADIANT DAWN

By Sister Katherine "Kit" Gray, CSJ

Introduction

One of the special traditions of Advent is the chanting of what are called the O Antiphons, antiphons that accompany the *Magnificat* canticle of Evening Prayer in the Liturgy of the Hours (Breviary) from December 17-23. The Roman Church has been singing the "O" Antiphons since at least the eighth century. The O Antiphons are the origin of the Advent hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Each antiphon begins with the invocation "O" and is a title or description for Christ drawn from Scripture.

- O Wisdom (Sirach 24:30)
- O Adonai, Sacred Lord (Matthew 2:6)
- O Root and Flower of Jesse's stem (Isaiah 11:10)
- O Key of David (Isaiah 22:22)
- O Radiant Dawn (Habakkuk 3:4)
- O King of the Nations (Haggai 2:8)
- O Emmanuel (Isaiah 7:14)

Ansgar Holmberg, CSJ and Joan Mitchell, CSJ call the O Antiphons the “Advent Names of God.” Kathleen Norris says that each name “evokes a part of our salvation history.” They are a magnificent theology that uses ancient biblical imagery to proclaim the coming Christ as the fulfillment not only of Old Testament hopes, but present ones as well.

In Scripture, a person’s name identified them and stood for something specific; naming carried special significance. God often changed the names of people—Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel—indicating a new relationship or role. In the New Testament, Simon becomes Peter, Saul becomes Paul.

No one name or title can capture the mystery of God, and various traditions have many names for God—Hinduism lists 1000 names for Vishnu, the Preserver; Islam speaks of God’s 99 Beautiful Names; Nathaniel Spiers compiled Biblical names in his book, *The 1000 Names of God*.

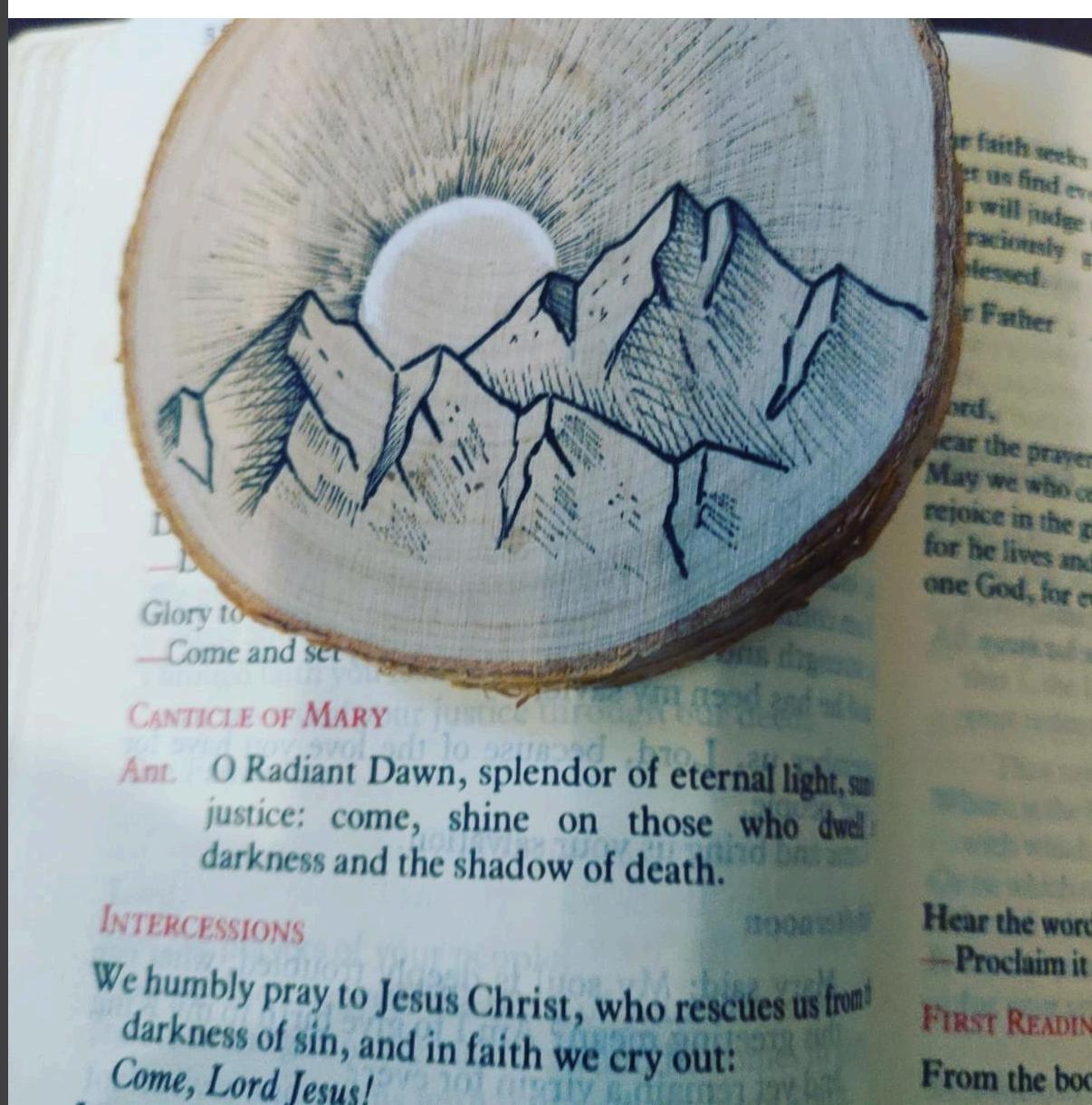
The Advent name for God on December 21 is O Radiant Dawn.

O RISING DAWN, O RADIANT DAWN,
Radiance of Light eternal and Sun of Justice,
Come, and enlighten those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

TRADITIONAL VESPERS ANTIphon, DECEMBER 21

Reflection Questions

- What does “dawn” mean?
- What does “dawn” suggest for you? What feelings do you associate with “rising sun?” What is the importance of light for human beings and all creation?



"How appropriate that this antiphon comes on the shortest day of the year! After this date, the days get longer. Jesus coming at this time of year, during Christmas, symbolizes the light of Christ in our lives. #advent #oantiphons @artdesignsbyzzy" by elliemom is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/2.0/?ref=openverse>.

Reflection

The Importance and Meaning of Light

Light is necessary for all life, for the production of the air we breathe, the cycles of our oceans, the magnetic fields around our planet, gravity, warmth, and our weather. Animals and humans depend on plants, which synthesize nutrients from light. The human body needs to be exposed to natural sunlight and its rhythm to function properly. Light on the human body produces vitamin D and melatonin; low levels of these can cause emotional dysfunction.

The word "light" is so important that it already brings the feeling of something good. A well-lit environment brings safety and comfort.

Light is the opposite of ignorance or darkness. Light is said to conquer darkness and bring order out of chaos.

Light in Scripture

Then God said: “Let there be light, and there was light.”

God saw that the light was good. God then separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.”

Evening came, and morning followed—the first day.

GENESIS 1: 3-5

*The people walking in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of darkness,
a light has dawned.*

ISAIAH 9:2

*God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.*

PSALM 46:5

*My soul waits for the Lord
More than the watchmen for the morning;
Indeed, more than the watchmen for the morning.*

PSALM 130:6

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

JOHN 1:5

Jesus spoke to them again, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

JOHN 8:12

For Pondering

How have you experienced Christ as light in your darkness?

For Prayer

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