Columns
Spirituality



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by Christine Schenk

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I love Advent. It brings a special brand of hope and light to the darkest days of our calendar year. This sacred season of waiting and expectation is especially poignant now as our world holds its collective breath wondering if joy is even possible amid pandemic pain.

But that is the whole point of Advent. We hope despite the darkness. We hope, not because we can see light, but because we trust in another to be light for us.

That other is Jesus.

On Dec. 17, the church's liturgy begins the "O" antiphons which are ancient refrains dating to the eighth century. Each day until Dec. 23, a different "O" antiphon is sung at Mass and in the church's Evening Prayer. The antiphons weave biblical imagery from the Hebrew Scriptures into a lovely theological tapestry celebrating the messianic titles of Jesus and what they might mean — yesterday, today and tomorrow.

These messianic titles are respectively, *O Sapientia* (O Wisdom), *O Adonai* (O Lord/Leader), *O Radix Jesse* (O Root of Jesse), *O Clavis David* (O Key of David), *O Oriens* (O Radiant Dawn/Dayspring), *O Rex Gentium* (O King of the Nations), *O Emmanuel* (O God-With-Us).

Several years ago, I reflected on the "O" antiphons and composed a prayer-poem (below) about what they might mean. For me, the coming of Jesus brings hope, comfort, light and a peace that truly does "surpass all understanding" (Philippians 4:7).

I invite you to take time to reflect on what the coming of Jesus might mean for you.

O Wisdom,

Sophia's child,

and Mary's too,

bring us back to you.

O Adonai,

set us free

of fear, despair,

misogyny.

O Justice Flower,

of Jesse tree,

uproot our hatreds.

Wash us clean

in just-reign waters,

plant us deep in Thee.

O Key of David,

open heaven's gate

unlock, unblock,

a captive people

too long enthralled

by hate.

O Radiant Dawn,

light the way

of all who long

to preach, to teach,

to consecrate

heavenly hosts

of God's indwelling.

O Emmanuel,

strengthen weary arms,

steady trembling knees

bring surcease of sorrow.

O Advent Light,

dispel death's dark shadow.

Awaken a waiting world

to life's fresh-blessed tomorrow.

For more on the "O" antiphons and to read the original, click here. Also, several years ago, the composer Joseph Gregorio set my prayer-poem to music. If you would like to listen, "Advent Reflections" is available online.

Soundcloud

[St. Joseph Sr. Christine Schenk, a National Catholic Reporter board member and columnist, served urban families for 18 years as a nurse midwife before co-founding FutureChurch, where she served for 23 years. Her recent book, *Crispina and Her Sisters: Women and Authority in Early Christianity*, was awarded first place in the history category by the Catholic Press Association. She holds master's degrees in nursing and theology.]

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