



Come, Jesus, Come

An Advent Vigil Based on the O Antiphons

To keep vigil is deeply human: to gather by candlelight after a disaster; to protest, peacefully, in places of power; to sit with one who is dying. Acts of vigil share both prayerful lament and a posture of watchfulness; the waiting is not passive, but actively beckons light in the midst of shadow. It is both a reminder of what is most important and an insistent act of hope.

This liturgy follows the ancient tradition of praying the “O Antiphons,” so called because each begins with the exclamation “O” and offers a different scriptural image for Jesus Christ (in helpfully expansive language). Interestingly, in the original Latin, the first letter of each antiphon (from last to first) forms the acrostic *ero cras*: “Tomorrow I will come.” Traditionally, the antiphons have been chanted, but they are most familiar to us through the Advent carol “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”

Here, a contemporary translation of each antiphon gives shape to a moment of prayer and silence, inviting reflection and transformation. The pain and struggle of the world are called to mind and the light of Christ—the light of wisdom and self-giving love—is invited again to illumine our lives and God’s world. These prayers provide a thematic template; however, you are encouraged to add other timely and relevant prayers as necessitated by events in the world and local community.

As a season of preparation, Advent is a time ripe for keeping watch for revealed love. We keep vigil for the Christ who comes again and always, to stand with us against powers and principalities and expose systemic injustice. With Mary, Joseph, and those who witnessed the birth, we watch for that same star to lead us home. And at the same time, we also are being waited for, watched over, strengthened, and blessed.

This liturgy combines the O Antiphons into a single service, which you might hold on an evening late in Advent near the longest night, the winter solstice (December 21)—or adapt in some other way.

Traditionally each antiphon provides the basis for a daily prayer beginning on December 17 and culminating on Christmas Eve. The antiphons are presented this way in *Watching and Waiting: A Daily Vigil Based on the O Antiphons* on the [Advent Unwrapped At Home](#) page.

—Rev. Andrew O’Neil,
St. Paul’s United Church, Riverview, NB

Gathering in God's Presence

Welcoming the Light

(After each call and response, light one of the Advent candles or a tea light on the communion table. Candles can also be lit before each prayer during the service.)

The God of all time and space is in this place.

Come, Creating God; shape us according to your hopeful vision.

Renewal of life—of trust that God is always with us—is in this place.

Come, Living Christ; reveal to us your way of peace.

The source of life and inspiration is in this place.

Come, Holy Spirit; stir us to the gift and joy of compassion.

Loving God, to you we raise our hearts and voices.

Shine your light of love in us and in all that we do.

Antiphon: O Wisdom



**O Wisdom, O holy Word of God,
you govern all creation with your revealed, compassionate care:
come and show your people the way to salvation.**

An alternative to reading each antiphon in unison is to have the choir sing a choral setting of each, or to have the congregation sing the corresponding verse of "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" (VU 1).

Hymn

"O Ancient Love" (VU 17)

Alternatives: "God of All Places" (VU 4), "All Earth Is Waiting" (VU 5), Psalm 130 (VU p. 852)

Sharing God's Word

Scripture

Consult the lectionary or choose a reading appropriate to your reflection.

Reflection

It may seem odd to begin with a reflection, but placing it here helps to articulate the purpose of the vigil.

Themes to consider: Perhaps it's always the case, but we seem to be in the midst of a season (*kairos*) ripe for our rededication to watchfulness. We are alert to the need for reconciliation, justice, and peace; alert to the need for freeing prisoners of conscience, challenging powers and principalities, and liberating ourselves and others from the destructive tyranny of consumerism; alert to the ways in which truth itself has become a victim to ignorance. We also always continue to be in need of our own liberation from the judgment and resentment that diminish our lives and relationships.

You may want to offer a brief reflection on our current political climate, in which the norms of civility, compassion, and the search for truth and peace have been jettisoned in favour of an alienating self-interest. Or use creative snapshots—such as those written by Rose Marie Berger for *Sojourners*, on www.poverty-church.org.uk—to provide a narrative introduction to the church's need for vigil, attentiveness, and advocacy in our time.

Alternatively, the scripture and reflection can be moved to the middle of the Advent Vigil Litany of prayer, or if this liturgy is used for a briefer, chapel-style service, left out altogether.

Responding in Prayer

Antiphon: O Adonai



**O Holy God of ancient days and today,
revealed to Moses at Sinai and to all people:
come, stretch out your mighty hand to set us free.**

Praying for Freedom

God who brings release to the captive, we pray for those imprisoned for their beliefs or by unjust laws. We pray for your people who continue to endure the violence or neglect of others. We pray for those who seek asylum on foreign shores, especially those who are held as

prisoners to uncertainty, isolated from their families, or sent back to face the terror they sought to escape.

God of Mercy, open our hearts and homes. Come and set all your people free.

We pray these things and offer now the unspoken prayers of our hearts... *(silence)*

Refrain

“Wait for the Lord” (VU 22)

Alternatives: “Kindle a Flame to Lighten the Dark” (VU 19), “Come Now, O God of Peace” (VU 34)

Antiphon: O Root of Jesse



**O Root of Jesse, you are raised up as a sign for all peoples;
leaders can only stand silent in your presence;
your people lift their hearts in worship before you.
Come to us, Living Hope.**

Praying for Transformation

Holy One, in Jesus you reveal true power in humility and true strength in peace. You pray that we all may be one, that we would seek the good of others before our own. As the nations rage, you come with no weapon and no threat, revealing the Way of Love: the soil in which change for the better takes root. Inspire us to be witnesses to truth, that we might share in the work of your kingdom: peace and justice and plenty for all.

God of Hope, we long for change. Bring peace to your world and people.

We pray these things and offer now the unspoken prayers of our hearts ... *(silence)*

Refrain

“Wait for the Lord” (VU 22)

Antiphon: O Key of David



**O Key of David, source of life and life eternal:
come, break down the prison walls of death
for those who dwell in the shadow of death.**

Praying for Courage

God of Light, who suffers with us and accompanies us through the valley, we pray for your children who walk in shadow: the anxiety of diagnosis and the long night of treatment; the pain of grieving the living who suffer depression, addiction and dementia; the helplessness of accompanying loved ones through illness and death; the emptiness of loss and loneliness. Renew our courage and strengthen us in times of trial.

God of Healing, help us to see our neighbour's need, and to reach out in love.

We pray these things and offer now the unspoken prayers of our hearts ... (*silence*)

Refrain

"Wait for the Lord" (VU 22)

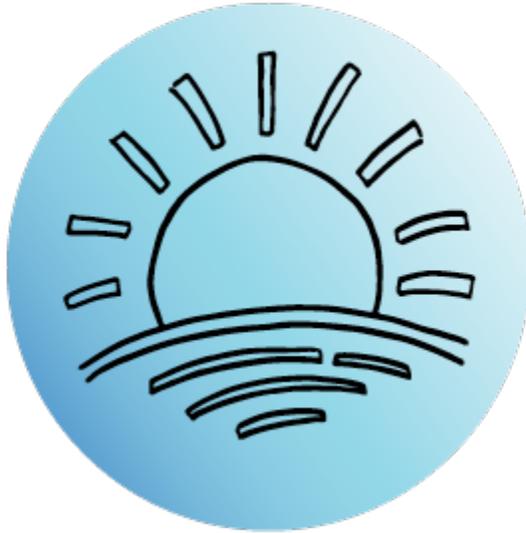
Hymn

"There's a Voice in the Wilderness Crying" (VU 18)

Alternatives: "Hail to God's Own Anointed" (VU 30), "O Lord, How Shall I Meet You" (VU 31)

Or, depending on the intended length of the service, omit a hymn here.

Antiphon: O Dayspring



**O Radiant Dawn, splendour of eternal light, sun of justice:
arise, shine on those who dwell in the shadow of death.**

Praying for Justice

God of promise, we pray for justice in our time: for healing, reconciliation and deepened relationship and trust among Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in our lands; for respect and dignity among peoples of every race, creed and colour, gender expression and sexual orientation; for the fair and equitable treatment, employment and consideration of all people under the law.

Foster within us a longing not only for our own fulfillment, but the fullness of life for all.

God of Love, shape us according to your life-giving vision.

We pray these things and offer now the unspoken prayers of our hearts ... (*silence*)

Refrain

“Wait for the Lord” (VU 22)

Antiphon: O King of the Nations



**O God of all, joy of every human heart;
O Keystone of the mighty arch of humanity:
Come and unite your people whom you fashioned in all the earth.**

Praying for Respect

God of All, known by many names, we pray for our neighbours of many faiths and no faith, as we find your image in all people. We give you thanks for the beauty of diversity, the challenge of difference, and the joy of curiosity and discovery. We pray for mutuality and respect in all our relationships, as individuals and as communities. Set your love as a seal upon our hearts, that we might learn to see others as you do, as your beloved children.

God of Joy, unite us in heart and purpose by your love.

We pray these things and offer now the unspoken prayers of our hearts ... (*silence*)

Refrain

“Wait for the Lord” (VU 22)

Antiphon: O God with Us



**O Emmanuel, revealed hope and source of trust:
come and set us free for your work and witness.
Show us how to live your redeeming love.**

Praying for Redemption

From the desert of exodus to water from the rock; from the valley of dry bones to the mount of transfiguration; from the cradle to the cross to the empty tomb; you, O God, redeem life from death. Our story of faith is a story of redeeming: hope from despair, peace from strife, joy from grief and love from loneliness and fear. As your people, we pray that the ways of life would prevail. We pray that you would transform your world and your people to be bearers of light and life and love.

God of all times and places, breathe life into your people and world.

We pray these things and offer now the unspoken prayers of our hearts ... *(silence)*

Anthem/Song

“Of the Father’s Love Begotten” (VU 61)

This ancient text, like the O Antiphons, sings of God’s gifts of life and renewal, and traces them through the history of faith. Its plainchant melody is sung freely, so is best suited for a single voice or rehearsed choir. The intensity of the verses builds from mystery and wonder to rejoicing in the final two verses.

Another excellent option is to lead the congregation in the Andraé Crouch gospel song, “Soon and Very Soon.”

Praying for the Pray-er

We pray for peace within our souls, borne of trust in you, your faithfulness, and your presence in all things.

We pray for strength to lift our voices for what is good and right to speak with those who have been shut out, shouted down, or forgotten.

We pray for the courage to speak truth in love, the compassion to listen for the brokenness of others, and to hear your voice in their words.

We pray for your healing Spirit upon all whom we call to mind... (*silent prayer*)

We pray these things in the name of the One Who Comes, Jesus the Christ, the One who is Wisdom, Freedom, Transformation, Courage, Justice, Respect, Redemption; come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel. Amen.

Hymn

“O Day of God Draw Nigh” (VU 688)

Alternatives: “God of All Places” (VU 4), “People, Look East” (VU 9), “It Came upon the Midnight Clear” (VU 44)

Benediction