

“O Wisdom” and “O Adonai”  
Isaiah 40:9-14 and Isaiah 33:10-22  
Advent Midweek I  
November 30, 2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It’s common nowadays to see Advent Calendars that use “the Twelve Days of Christmas” type theme as the anticipation of Christmas Day. Of course, the world has it all backwards, as the “Twelve Days” are not the days *expecting* Christmas, but *of* Christmas – the totality of the Christmas Season from the Christmas festival to the Epiphany festival. So, if we do not employ the “Twelve Days” theme for the Advent days expecting Christmas, how do we properly discipline ourselves to focus on and expect the festival of our Lord’s Nativity?

For 1500 years, the Church has been singing the Great “O” Antiphons as a means of keeping time in the final days anticipating the festival of the Nativity of our Lord. About 300 years ago, those antiphons were lumped into one hymn we now know as “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.” But, for the 1200 years before that, the O Antiphons would be used – one per day – beginning with December 17<sup>th</sup>, meditating upon a different title and character of the Christ each day leading up to the celebration of his birth.

Because this year’s Advent schedule concludes our annual three-week midweek series on December 14<sup>th</sup> and the meditation

between then and the festival of the Nativity is largely private for each household, I thought it would be a good year to introduce these “O Antiphons,” – two each Wednesday – that, beginning on the 17<sup>th</sup>, you may use the traditionally appointed antiphon (which you will have just learned about) in your Advent preparation... with one twist: we’ll save the final Antiphon “O Emmanuel” for December 24<sup>th</sup> and meditate upon it on Christmas Eve... and on Christmas Eve, we’ll learn what the title “Ero Cras” means, as seen on the top of your service handout. (And, if you want to spoil it and go Google it before then, keep it to yourself.)

Tonight, we begin with the first two of the Antiphons, “O Wisdom” (or, from the Latin, O Sapientia) and “O Adonai.”

It’s fitting that we begin with the antiphon “O Wisdom,” for, in a certain sense, it needs extra attention; we need to see it in the context of all the others. For, when we compare Christ to the word ‘wisdom,’ we tend to rather flatly say “Okay, so he’s wise.” And, we’ll acknowledge that in theory, but then in our sin we’ll begin to challenge Christ’s wisdom with our supposed own wisdom until we reason ourselves wiser than Christ and rationalize ourselves right out of the Christian faith.

But, perhaps we’re less inclined to make that mistake if we recognize that none of the other antiphons refer to a *characteristic* of the second person of the Trinity, but to a **title** of that second

person of the Trinity – a title, by the way, unique to the second person of the Trinity.

And if “Wisdom” is a title unique to Christ, then we can never approach him as equals and compare our ‘smarts’ with His. That’s not the point of using the title ‘wisdom.’ Rather, the truth behind this title “Wisdom” comes to us from Proverbs 8, which identifies the second person of the Trinity as *distinct* from the Father, but in *cooperation with Him* as the Father’s master workman of all creation:

“I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,  
and I find knowledge and discretion...  
when [the LORD] marked out the foundations of the earth,  
then I was beside him, like a master workman,  
and I was daily his delight,

In other words, as the Father is the Creator, the Son is the Wisdom that gives meaning to all creation. Apart from the Son, the creation means nothing... for it is the Son who has all understanding over creation, as we heard through the prophet Isaiah:

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand  
and marked off the heavens with a span,  
enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure  
and weighed the mountains in scales  
and the hills in a balance?...

<sup>14</sup> Whom did he consult,  
and who made him understand?  
Who taught him the path of justice,

and taught him knowledge,  
and showed him the way of understanding?

Christ not only *possesses* all knowledge and understanding; he is the source of it. **He is wisdom itself.**

How does the Antiphon express this? – “O Wisdom, proceeding from the mouth of the Most High.” Or, as John says it, “And the Word was with God and the Word was God... All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made” ...nothing was made without the Word proceeding from the mouth of the Father to enact the Father’s will, “Let there be.” Thus, “O Wisdom, proceeding from the mouth of the Most High, *pervading and permeating all creation, mightily ordering all things.*”

Notice, nothing has right order apart from the Son. The creation’s entire identity and purpose is known only through the Son, and apart from him all is chaos, disordered, meaningless. Thus, lost in error’s ignorance are civilizations, communities, families, relationships ...when they refuse to acknowledge that the Wisdom that created every detail of creation – including their own relationship, family, community, and society – is the second person of the Trinity, the Son of the Most High. But, in Him, there is Truth, not just spiritual truth, but the Truth regarding all things, for all things were created through Him who pervades and permeates all creation, mightily ordering all things.

Thus, when the good prophetic word rings out that this Wisdom of God is invading human history by coming into the flesh, what do the faithful pray for? Does praying for salvation mean that we pray Christ come and redeem us that we may continue to live in the darkness of ignorance, chaos, and disorder? ... that we pray that Christ come and redeem us *from His Wisdom ordering all things by His might?*

No, the faithful pray, “Come and teach us the way of prudence.” When Christ – who is the Way and the Truth of our life – when He conforms our daily life to himself, the creation makes sense, our daily life is prudent, the creation benefits us in accord with His will. Thus, we ought pray for him not only to save us from individual sins, but to save us from a life lived in the image of the Old Adam rather than in the image of God in which Wisdom originally created us. We ought pray that He would pervade and permeate our daily lives with the good order of His Way, that we may live in the joy of His redeeming work.

As we pray “O Wisdom,” we also pray similarly “O Adonai.” It would almost seem to be non-specific/generic, for Adonai was the Hebrews’ substitution for the name YHWH, which they refused to speak out of deep reverence for the Most High. And so, where the first antiphon prays “O Wisdom, proceeding from the mouth of *the Most High*,” it would seem we are now praying to the Most High when we pray “O Adonai.”

But, in the mystery of the Godhead, the second person of the Holy Trinity is here specifically referenced. And, we know it's Him to whom the Antiphon refers for it praises Him as He "who appeared to Moses in the burning bush..." That 'theophany' or viewing of God was not Moses laying eyes on *the Father*, but speaking to "the Angel of the Lord," the pre-incarnate *Christ*. And as Moses spoke to the pre-incarnate Christ in the burning bush, and as the epistle of Jude says it was the pre-incarnate Christ who led the people (as a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night) through the wilderness, so then the antiphon confesses the great likelihood that it was the pre-incarnate Christ who descended in a great cloud atop Sinai and gave – as divine messenger and Word – the holy Law to Moses: "O Adonai and ruler of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush *and gave him the Law on Sinai...*"

The related verse of the hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel" shortens this antiphon to focus only on the giving of the Law on Sinai and, thus, the Christian loses the leading reference of the burning bush and begins to assume this reference to "Adonai" is a generic reference to "God" and so begins to think of the Father. But the antiphon's reference is clearly to the Son, another *title* of the Son, and it calls us to meditate upon what it means that the Son is Adonai, who led His people out of bondage and gave them the holy Law, that Law which brings holy order to all creation.

John's gospel tells us "The law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ." Notice the important difference in the word choice: grace and truth **came** through Jesus Christ, but the law **was given** through Moses. Moses may have been the human agent, but he was not the authority behind the Law. Instead Adonai gave the Law, that Adonai being the very Word of God who is God and was in the beginning with God. And the Word that Adonai *is* and proclaims is not just the gospel, but is also the law, as He says, "I came not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it." Thus, grace *and truth* came through Jesus Christ, for the truth is not only the truth of our salvation, but is also the truth of God's holy will. Apart from Christ's grace, the holy Law seems an obligation and obstacle no man can overcome. But, safe in the grace of Christ Jesus, we are also brought to the truth that the Law is pure and holy and righteous and good.

Notice the relationship as Isaiah prophesies it in our second reading. The prophet begins with the Lord's pledge to rise up and redeem His people:

"Now I will arise," says the LORD,  
"now I will lift myself up;  
now I will be exalted."

And as those words remind us of the opening lines of Isaiah's famous prophecy regarding the Suffering Servant, that prophecy the Father begins with these words,

Behold, my servant shall act wisely;  
he shall be high and lifted up,  
and shall be exalted.

...as those phrases echo even in tonight's text about Adonai – "now I will lift myself up, now I will be exalted" – they prepare us for the salvation and redemption Adonai brings *and* they give us every reason to love Him as He not only speaks through the burning bush to give His plan of deliverance but also through the cloud on Sinai to give His holy Law. And, thus, tying those two things together – the giver of the Law and the giver of salvation – our text from Isaiah's prophecy ends with these words:

For the LORD is our judge; the LORD is our lawgiver;  
the LORD is our king; he will save us.

The goodness of God's holy Law we cannot know as long as we are in the bondage of Sin, that Sin being rightly cursed by the Law. We must be freed from the curse (not from the Law, but from the sin that merits the curse) in order to see the Law for the goodness that it is. Thus, it is right for this second great "O" antiphon to pray to the giver of the Law, "Come with an outstretched arm and redeem us."

That "outstretched arm" was an image of the Exodus, wasn't it? How much more so of the greater exodus out of this fallen world and into the life of the world to come! Indeed, 'Adonai, come with an

outstretched arm and redeem us,' for in that redemption of the Exodus, the people had every reason to revere and love the holy Law that was only thereafter taught them on Mt Sinai. In the same way, it is precisely *because* we are the redeemed of Christ, precisely *because* he has come with arms outstretched upon the cross, that we are free to be His people, who *love* His will, desire to walk in His ways, and therefore learn and meditate upon and repent before his holy Law.

So then, we have the first two great "O" antiphons:

O Wisdom, proceeding from the mouth of the Most High, pervading and permeating all creation, mightily ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.

O Adonai and ruler of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and gave him the Law on Sinai: Come with an outstretched arm and redeem us.

And, in proper Advent fashion, these first two antiphons teach us to love the Law, to repent of our sins, to desire God's holy will, and to eagerly anticipate salvation.

Thus, O Come, Wisdom... O Come, Adonai... teach us the way of prudence and redeem us. A most fitting prayer on which to begin our antiphonal Advent meditation.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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November 30, 2022