

# WHAT THE O Antiphons TEACH US ABOUT FAITH

KATHLEEN M. BASI

## Reclaim the Catholic identity of Advent with these simple story-prayers

► If you know the song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," then you know the O Antiphons. Kathleen M. Basi does a wonderful job of taking us a step further. She shows us the scriptural roots of the antiphons and how they can lead us to deeper faith. ✦ NOV

Every year about this time, it starts—the ads laced with sleigh bells, the greenery in the department stores. We shake our heads, but start making Christmas lists and hanging lights. By December 26, it's all over; Advent has been lost to a flurry of activity that has little to do with the coming of Christ.

### Catholic identity

But we can reclaim Advent for ourselves and for our learners. The O Antiphons, upon which the Advent song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" is based, offer us a great opportunity to teach young Catholics basic truths about our faith. The antiphons draw their inspiration from the messianic prophecies of Isaiah. They are every bit as relevant today as they were when

they were written 12 centuries ago. Here is one way to incorporate these beautiful verses into a lesson.

### Teaching the O Antiphons

Begin by singing "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." Then use the outline below to introduce each antiphon. Have your learners follow along in their bibles as you read the Scripture passages. Use the reflections as a starting place for discussion. Afterward, learners can color the corresponding symbols on the ornament template.

### Sapientia

*"O Wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love: come to teach us the path of knowledge!"* (Is 11:2-3)

✦ **Faith is:** accepting what we don't understand.

In the beginning, the Son was with God as the universe was created. Now the created world longs to see through God's eyes. There's so much pain and suffering in the world. Why? We believe that God has a plan, but we don't understand it. We want God's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven," but we know that

we can't do it without God's help.

### Adonai

*"O Leader of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai: come to rescue us with your mighty power!"* (Is 11:4-5)

✦ **Faith is:** the law that frees us.

Moses brought Israel out of slavery in Egypt. At Sinai, God promised to watch over the people, and they promised to follow God; the law set them free.

Jesus saves us from the slavery of sin. Sometimes we see religion as a bunch of rules, keeping us from doing what we want. But when we follow Christ, we discover that many of the things we want really aren't important, after all. We become free.

### Radix Jesse

*"O Root of Jesse's stem, sign of God's love for all his people: come to save us without delay!"* (Is 11:1, 10)

✦ **Faith is:** humble.

Jesus was the Messiah, descended from kings. Shouldn't he have been rich and important? Instead, he was born in a manger. He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and he died a humiliating, agonizing death. Our culture emphasizes status and power. Jesus

# The **O Antiphons** ornament

## MATERIALS

scissors, tape, crayons,  
yarn, hole punch

## OPTIONAL

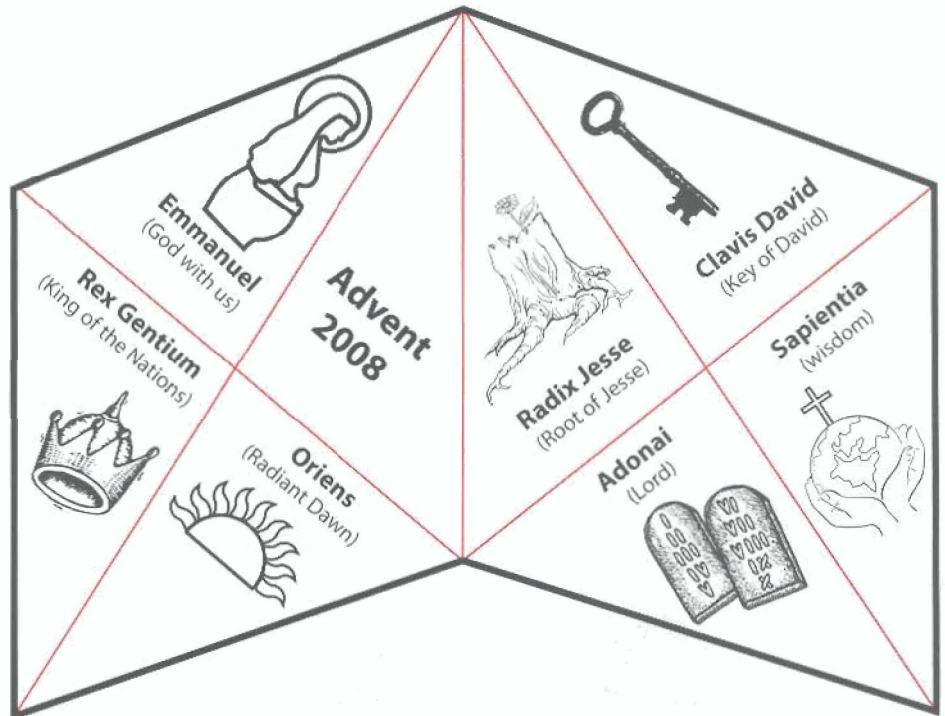
cotton for stuffing

## PREPARATION

Copy the ornament template onto white cardstock, one for each student.

Color the symbol...

2. Cut out the ornament and fold along the interior lines, with the pictures facing out.
3. Stuff the ornament and fasten the edges with tape.
4. Punch a hole in the top and thread with yarn.



holds up a different ideal. He is a new branch growing from an ancient root.

## Clavis David

*"O Key of David, opening the gates of God's eternal kingdom: come and free the prisoners of darkness!" (Is 22:22)*

✦ **Faith is:** passed from generation to generation.

When Jesus rose from the dead, he conquered the power of death and opened the gates of heaven. Jesus entrusted Peter and the apostles with the authority to "loose and bind" (Mt 16:19), an authority which is passed down through the bishops and the sacrament of reconciliation.

## Oriens

*"O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death." (Is 9:1)*

✦ **Faith is:** illuminating.

Imagine walking in the woods after dark. You can't see where you're going; you can't tell what is making the noises you hear. It's scary. Light helps us see where we're headed. It makes it easier to face the unknown.

## Rex Gentium

*"O King of all nations and keystone of the church: come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!" (Is 9:5)*

✦ **Faith is:** unifying.

One activity at the St. Louis Science Center involves building the Gateway Arch out of soft blocks. It's tricky, because if you let go, the legs fall down. Not until the keystone goes in at the top, joining the two legs together, does the structure stand by itself. Jesus is our keystone. We long for him to come back—not as a baby, but as the

glorious king who will bring an end to war and make all nations one. Until that day, the hope for peace is just that: hope.

## Emmanuel

*"O Emmanuel, our king and Giver of Law: come to save us, Lord our God!" (Is 7:14)*

✦ **Faith is:** close by.

"Emmanuel" means "God-with-us."

Now we focus specifically on the Incarnation—the birth of Christ. But we must always remember that the most important part of Jesus' life was not his birth, but his death and resurrection. **RTJ**

Kathleen M. Basi has been a liturgy director for parishes and schools for eight years. She and her husband codirect their parish contemporary music group. Her e-mail address is kokopeli74@yahoo.com.