

Origin of the text for *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

The text of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* is a translation of a poetic paraphrase of a group of seven ancient Latin chants called the *Great O Antiphons*. These antiphons first appeared in the *Liber responsalis* which has been attributed to Pope Gregory I (590-604), and are thought to be even centuries older. Each one of these antiphons starts by addressing one of the various names given to God: *O Sapientia* (O Wisdom), *O Adonai* (O Adonai), *O Radix Jesse* (O Root of Jesse), *O Clavis David* (O Key of David), *O Oriens* (O Morning Star), *O Rex Gentium* (O King of the nations), and *O Emmanuel* (O Emmanuel). The main verb in all the antiphons is the word, *veni* (come), and through this word the Lord is petitioned to “come” using the various names ascribed to God by the prophets in the Old Testament.

During the late ninth century an unknown English author made a skillful paraphrase of the “*Os*” in what is now called “Advent” or formerly, “Christ I.” This paraphrase omitted antiphons 1 (*O Sapientia*) and 6 (*O Rex Gentium*). It was from this paraphrase that an early eighteenth century author (also unknown) wrote a metrical version of the antiphons. This metrical version is what is used today for *Veni, Veni, Emmanuel* (O Come, O Come, Emmanuel). During the mid-nineteenth century various translations in English started to appear. The Translation I have chosen is by T. A. Lacey:

<p><i>Veni, veni Emmanuel, Captivum solvum Israel, Qui gemit in exilio, Privatus Dei Filio.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Refrain:</p> <p><i>Gaude, gaude! Emmanuel nascetur prote, Israel.</i></p>	<p>O come, O come, Emmanuel! Redeem thy captive Israel, That into exile drear is gone Far from the face of God's dear Son.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Refran:</i></p> <p>Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.</p>
<p><i>Veni, O Jesse virgula; Ex hostis tuos ungula, De specu tuos tartari, Educ et antro barathri,</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Refrain</p>	<p>O come, thou Branch of Jesse! Draw the quarry from the lion's claw; From the dread caverns of the grave, From nether hell, thy people save.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Refrain</i></p>
<p><i>Veni, veni, O Oriens, Solare nos adveniens; Noctis depele nebulas, Dirasque mortis tenebras,</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Refrain</p>	<p>O come, O come, thou Dayspring bright! Pour on our souls thy healing light; Dispel the long night's ling'ring gloom, And pierce the shadows of the tomb.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Refrain</i></p>
<p><i>Veni Clavis Davidica; Regna reclude caelica; Fac iter tutum superum, Et claude vias inferum.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Refrain</p>	<p>O come, thou Lord of David's Key! The royal door fling wide and free; Safeguard for us the heav'nward road, And bar the way to death's abode.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Refrain</i></p>
<p><i>Veni, veni Adonai, Qui populo in Sinai, Legem dedisti vertice, In majestate gloriae.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;">Refrain</p>	<p>O come, O come, Adonai! Who in thy glorious majesty From that high mountain clothed with awe Gavest thy folk the elder law.</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Refrain</i></p>

The *Great O Antiphons*

During the Middle Ages the *O Antiphons* were sung before and after the *Magnificat* on the seven ferial days leading up to Christmas Eve, December 17 through December 23 – one antiphon for each day. All of the texts have been derived from Old Testament scriptures, particularly from the Prophet Isaiah. It has been pointed out by some scholars that the antiphons never refer to Jesus Christ or any type of Trinitarian allusions, making some to wonder if the antiphons are more deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition of Hanukkah and Succoth rather than the Christian tradition of Christmas and the prophesying of the coming of Christ. Nevertheless, the Orthodox Christians have claimed the antiphons as their own, and are now a fairly cemented part of the Christian liturgy.

Much significance was given to the expression, *O* and the word, *veni*. It is from these two textual motifs that the author of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* derived the scheme for his text. The ancient composers of the chants also used the same relative musical motif for both *O* and *veni*:

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These recurring motifs provide formulaic divisions, or a sense of form, to each of the antiphons. The tonal structure is in a natural minor or Aeolian mode, and the haunting melodies have a strong sense of balance between mellismatic and syllabic textures, as well as between stepwise and leaping melodic motion. The combination of form and balance along with an undeniable sense of musical expression melded together with texts of a profound cohesive spirit gives each antiphon a beauty unsurpassed by other

groups of chants contemporary to the “*Os*.”

I have decided to list the *O Antiphons* for reference or for possible performance. Each antiphon is listed in the order of the day on which it is sung according to the seven ferial days leading up to Christmas Eve. The argument as to whether these chants were derived from a Jewish origin or a Christian origin may never be settled, but it does create a broader range of possibilities for performance. Because of this ambiguity, the chants would be suitable for liturgical performances within a synagogue or a church, as well as for secular concerts. Specific performance ideas include singing each chant, one after the other, in a processional at the beginning of a service or concert, or strategically interspersing them throughout a service or concert. Of course, the chants can also be sung in accordance with the Christian tradition of singing a particular chant on its prescribed day in December.

Performance practice

Some issues of performance practice do need to be addressed. The most important thing to remember when performing chant is to *not* sing each note as if it were written within the context of a metrical meter. There are strong accents and weak accents, but these accents are dictated by the stress of certain syllables within the flow of certain words and phrases. This frees up the rhythm into a prose-like flow whether syllabic or mellismatic. Basically, syllabic notes will be rhythmically dictated by the flow of the speech and stresses on certain syllables, and mellismatic notes will have a slightly quicker rhythmic flow. When coming to an end of a musical phrase, the tempo should become relaxed or slightly slowed down.

Vocal production should be relaxed, not forcing the sound, with almost no vibrato, if possible. Chant is sung in unison, and can very often go out of tune. Much practice, listening, and care must be taken to ensure a proper unison balance that stays in tune. Doubling a chant an octave higher with women’s or treble voices is also a widely accepted choral practice that can help the choir stay in tune. This also encourages maximum participation. One important thing to remember about chant is that these seemingly simple melodies can be sung with such profound human and musical expression that they become portals to the living past, which helps link the singers to their spiritual present.

There are some notational symbols that are not part of the standard modern notation system. These symbols will need some clarification:

	Quarter bar – a brief pause where the voice may sustain or a short breath may be taken
	Half bar – a minor divisional pause where a short breath should be taken
	Full bar – a major divisional pause where the last notes should be prolonged followed by a full breath
	Final bar – indicates the closing of the chant
	Smaller notes – indicates closing immediately to the voiced consonant (L, M, N)
	Diamond-shaped notes – less emphasis is given to these notes. Usually, they are performed slightly quicker than the preceding notes.

December 17: O Sapientia

(Isaiah 11:2-3, Isaiah 28:29, Sirach 24:3, Wisdom of Solomon 8:1)

<i>O Sapientia, quae ex ore Altissimi prodiisti, attingens a fine usque ad finem, fortiter suaviterque disponens omnia: veni ad docendum nos viam prudentiae.</i>	O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come to teach us the way of prudence.
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December 18: O Adonai (Isaiah 11:4-5, Isaiah 33:22, Exodus 3:2, Exodus 24:12)

<i>O Adonai, et Dux domus Israel, qui Moysi in igne flammae rubi apparuisti, et ei in Sina legem dedisti: veni ad redimendum nos in brachio extento.</i>	O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come to redeem us with an outstretched arm.
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December 19: O Radix Jesse (Isaiah 11:1, Isaiah 11:10, Micah 5:1, Isaiah 45:14, Isaiah 52:15, Romans 15:12)

<i>O Radix Jesse, qui stas in signum populorum, super quem continebunt reges os suum, quem Gentes deprecabuntur: veni ad liberandum nos, jam noli tardare.</i>	O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before whom kings will shut their mouths, whom the nations will implore: Come to deliver us, and do not now delay.
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December 20: O Clavis David (Isaiah 22:22, Isaiah 9:7, Isaiah 42:7)

<i>O Clavis David, et sceptrum domus Israel; qui aperis, et nemo claudit; claudis, et nemo aperit: veni, et educ vinctum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris, et umbra mortis.</i>	O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel; you open and no one can shut; you shut and no one can open: Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.
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December 21: O Oriens (Isaiah 9:2, Isaiah 60:1-2, Malachi 4:2)

<i>O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol justitiae: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris, et umbra mortis.</i>	O Morning Star, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness: Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.
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December 22: O Rex Gentium (Isaiah 9:6, Isaiah 2:4, Isaiah 28:16, Ephesians 2:14)

<i>O Rex Gentium, et desideratus earum, lapisque angularis, qui facis utraque unum: veni, et salva hominem, quem de limo formasti.</i>	O King of the nations, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one: Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay.
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December 23: O Emmanuel (Isaiah 7:14)

<i>O Emmanuel, Rex et legifer noster, expectatio Gentium, et Salvator earum: veni ad salvandum nos, Domine, Deus noster.</i>	O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Saviour: Come to save us, O Lord our God.
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Pronunciation guide for Ecclesiastical Latin

		Vowels and Diphthongs		
	sounds like	'ah'	as in the word	<i>Father</i>
<i>A (gravi)</i>	"....."		'eh'	"....." <i>red</i>
<i>E (pectore)</i>	"....."		'ee'	"....." <i>feet</i>
<i>I (hic)</i>	"....."		'oh'	"....." <i>for</i>
<i>O (cor)</i>	"....."		'oo'	"....." <i>moon</i>
<i>U (puppi)</i>	"....."			

Y (*kyrie*) “.....” ‘ee’ “.....” *daily* (like the Latin *i*)

For the most part when vowels come together each vowel should be sounded. For example, the word *diēi* sounds as ‘dee-éh-ee’, *fili* sounds as ‘fee-lee-ee’, and *eórum* sounds as ‘eh-óh-room’. The only time a diphthong is not used is during the combination of the vowels *AE* and *OE*. Both these combinations sound like the Latin *E* – as if they are one syllable as in the word *caelum* – sounds like ‘cheh-loom’.

Consonants

C coming before *e*, *ae*, *oe*, *i*, or *y* sounds like ‘ch’ as in the word ‘church’. For example, *Cecilia* sounds like ‘cheh-cheé-li-ah’. *CC* before *e*, *ae*, *oe*, *i*, or *y* sounds like ‘t-ch’ – e.g. *siccitas* sounds like ‘seét-chee-tahs’. *SC* before *e*, *ae*, *oe*, *i*, or *y* sounds like ‘sh’ as in the word ‘shed’ – e.g. *Descéndit* sounds like ‘Deh-shéhn-deet’. Except for these instances *C* and *CH* are always pronounced like the English *K* – e.g. *cuncta* sounds like ‘koón-ktah’, and *máchina* sounds like ‘máh-kee-nah’.

G before *e*, *ae*, *oe*, *i*, or *y* is soft as in generous – e.g. *mádgí*, *génitor*, *Regina*. Otherwise *G* is hard as in Government – e.g. *Gubernátor*, *Vigor*, and *Ego*. *GN* has the soft sound given to these letters in French and Italian – e.g. *agneau*, *Signor* and *Monsignor*. The nearest English equivalent would be *N* followed by *y* – e.g. *Regnum* sounds like ‘reh-nyoom’ and *Magnificat* sounds like ‘Mah-nyéé-fee-caht’.

J, often written as *I*, is treated as *Y*, forming one sound with the following vowel – e.g. *Jam* sounds like ‘Yam’

R: when with another consonant, care must be taken not to omit this sound. It must be slightly rolled on the tongue.

S is hard as in the English word *sea* but is slightly softened when coming between two vowels – e.g. *misericórdia*.

TI standing before a vowel and following any letter (except *S*, *X* and *T*) is pronounced as ‘tsee.’

X is pronounced ‘ks’; slightly softened coming between two vowels – e.g. *exercitus*.

Z is pronounced as ‘dz’ or ‘ts’.

All The rest of the consonants, *B*, *D*, *F*, *K*, *L*, *M*, *N*, *P*, *Q*, *T* and *V*, are pronounced as in English.

Origin of the tune for *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

The *Veni, Emmanuel* tune did not gain popularity in the modern era until Thomas Helmore (1811-1890), choir and chant specialist, and John Mason Neale (1818-1866), hymnologist and translator, plucked it out of obscurity in the mid-nineteenth century from a French Missal in the National Library in Lisbon, Portugal. They first published the tune in the *Hymnal Noted* (Part II, 1856), but could never relocate the source from which they had originally made the transcription. Neale’s translation of the *Veni, Emmanuel* text was used for the newly found tune. The melding of the tune and text fit almost too perfectly together, causing some scholars to argue that Helmore, himself, composed the tune based on a number of plainsong fragments to fit Neale’s translation. It wasn’t until the mid-twentieth century that Helmore’s honor would be vindicated by a Nun and champion of chant and early music, Mother Thomas More (also known as Dr. Mary Berry, 1917-2008). In 1966, while working in the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, France, More came across a small fifteenth century *Processional* which had belonged to French Franciscan Nuns. She describes her account of what she found:

On folio 89ff there are a number of additional verses for the funeral responsory *Libera me*, beginning ‘Bone Jesu dulcis cunctis’. The melody of these tropes is none other than the tune of *O come, O come, Emmanuel*. It appears on the left-hand page, noted in square puncta. On the right-hand page is a second part which fits in note-against-note harmony with the hymn-tune.

More was not certain if the *Processional* she found was the same source as Helmore’s, but proved that the tune was being sung at least four hundred years before his time. She also suggested that the tune could be many centuries older. Below is More’s own transcription of what she found:

This tune and text would make a wonderful addition to the *O Antiphons* during a service or concert program. Of course, the chant would also be appropriate within the context of which it was written – a requiem responsory. The translation is as follows:

*Bóne Jésu dúlcis cunctis aeterni patris filius.
Te precamur pro defunctis assis eis propitiouis.
Vulneru punde citius patri pro tuo famulo.
Ut fruatur uberius tui perenni gaudio.*

O good and faithful Jesus, joined with the Eternal Father
We beseech thee on behalf of the departed that you will be
gracious.
Most swiftly show thy wounds to the Father for thy servants
sake
That he may receive your eternal joys.

The arrangement of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

There have been many arrangements of Helmore’s *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* whether in the original Latin or a translated equivalent. My arrangement for men’s voices can be sung in either English or Latin. The first verse (*Veni, veni Emmanuel*) opens with a single chant in unison voices, while the second verse (*Veni, O Jesse virgule*) exhibits a style similar to organum. The third (*Veni, Veni O Oriens*) and fourth (*Veni Clavis Davidica*) verses use all four parts harmonized mostly in a homophonic texture that builds with intensity as each phrase progresses. The last verse (*Veni, veni Adonai*) makes use of a drone in the Bass and Baritone parts, while the 1st and 2nd Tenors sing the melody in a slow round. The final refrain starts with a thick

harmonic texture, and resolves softly with a progression of mostly perfect fifths. Every part has been written with care to assimilate a chant style with no awkward leaps or modulations. This arrangement would also make a great compliment to the *O Antiphons*, and would fit well within an Advent or Christmas themed concert or service.

About the arranger

Mark Templeton, born 1974, was the Founder, Artistic Director, Composer and Arranger of West Virginia's professional all-male vocal ensemble, *Cantabile*. He has directed *Cantabile* in recordings and performances of critical acclaim – most notably on Public Radio. Mr. Templeton's compositions for men's voices have been featured at various festivals including the Indiana, Georgia, and Texas Allstate festivals and the National ACDA convention in New York. Mr. Templeton was at one time the Composer in Residence for *The Appalachian Children's Chorus* in WV. In addition to composing, singing and conducting, Mr. Templeton enjoys musicological research. His research interests include ethno-music, particularly ancient music of Africa and the Middle East, and early music, particularly that of Josquin and Palestrina. When Mr. Templeton is not spending time being a musician, he enjoys playing and coaching soccer. Mr. Templeton is currently residing in Newark, Delaware.

Allen Cabaniss, "A Jewish Provenience of the Advent Antiphons," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series, Vol. 66, No. 1 (July 1975): 40.

The expression, "ferial day" refers to the certain days set aside for religious rest, and for the celebration of feasts instituted by the Church. These feast days would bring about large market gatherings, and is where the English get the word, "fair." Francis Mersman, "Feria," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 6, New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909; available from <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06043a.htm> (accessed March 2, 2009).

Cabaniss says the antiphon's "allusions to wilderness wandering after the Egyptian bondage, to darkness and the shadow of death, to light, to the keystone of the Temple, and to the unity of God's people as they marched in procession with leafy boughs (Psalm 118)" points to more of a Jewish celebration of Succoth (II Macc. 1:9, 18; 10:6-7) than to a celebration of Christmas. Cabaniss, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

One of the reasons the Orthodox Christians claim ownership of the antiphons is because, they say, each antiphon points to the prophecy of the coming of Christ. There is also an acrostic that may be linked to this "coming" – if one were to take the initial letters of each title and place them in reverse order it would read, "ERO CRAS" which is interpreted as "Tomorrow, I shall come." David Hiley, *Western Plainchant, a Handbook*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 98-99.

Most chant books use square note-heads, but for the sake of clarity, I have chosen to use standard round note-heads. For a detailed interpretation for the rules of chant notation see The Benedictines of Solesmes, *The Liber Usualis*, (New York, 1963), pp. xj-xxxij.

Liber Usualis, xxxv-xxxviii

Thomas Helmore is mostly known for his publications of *Carols for Christmas, 1853*, the *Hymnal Noted, Part II, 1856*, and a translation of Fetis' *Treatise on Choir and Chorus Singing, 1885*. Bernarr Rainbow, "Thomas Helmore – II, The Mystery of 'Veni Emmanuel,'" *Musical Times*, Vol. 100, No. 1401 (Nov., 1959): 621-622. J. M. Neale was the first to translate *Veni Emmanuel* into English (1851), and his is the most famous translation. Walter N. Myers, "Ancient and Medieval Latin Hymns," *Classical Weekly*, Vol. 20, No. 20 (March, 28, 1927): 159. The English translation I have chosen for my arrangement is by T. A. Lacey.

Rainbow, 621.

For a remarkable account of Mother Thomas More's life see Kenneth Shenton, "Mary Berry: Enthusiast for Gregorian Chant" *The Independent*, May 28, 2008; available from <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/mary-berry-enthusiast-for-gregorian-chant-835160.html> (accessed March 3, 2009).

Paris, Bibl. Nat., Fonds Latin, MS 10.581

Mother Thomas More, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," *Musical Times*, Vol. 107, No. 1483 (Sep., 1966): 772

Nicholas Temperly, "Veni Emanuel," *Musical Times*, Vol. 107, No. 1485 (Nov., 1966): 968

Translation by Bruce Wilson (2009)