

From the Rectory

Rev Tim Bennison shares some Advent thoughts ...

As the evenings draw in, and Christmas lights and music become ever more in evidence, we can be sure that, once again, we are about to enter into the season of Advent. And perhaps, more than any other season of the church's year, the season of Advent stands at odds with what's going on in the world at large.

For most people, we are now in the run-up to Christmas and things are becoming increasingly festive with parties, eating, drinking, being merry – and frantic shopping.

In the church, we are also in the run-up to Christmas, but our preparations are somewhat different as we reflect and prepare ourselves to meet with Christ who is to be amongst us.

And that process of thinking and preparation is reflected in the distinctive spirituality of Advent – particularly in the prayers, readings, hymns and psalms of the Daily Office – all of which seem charged with hope, expectation and excitement about the future.

One particular tradition which reflects this feeling is that of the so-called 'O' Antiphons. These are seven short verses, or antiphons, which are sung before the Magnificat during Evening Prayer, or Vespers, on the seven days before the vigil of Christmas (Christmas Eve).

They each begin with the exclamation 'O'; And each of them ends with a plea for the Messiah to come. As Christmas approaches the cry becomes more urgent.

The antiphons were composed in the seventh or eighth century when monks put together texts from the Old Testament which looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and Salvation. They form a rich mosaic of scriptural images. They became very popular in the Middle Ages. While the monastic choirs sang the antiphons the great bells of the church were rung. This period of seven days, plus the vigil of Christmas is sometimes called 'sapienatide' after the first of the 'O' antiphons.

A curious feature of these antiphons is that the first letter of each invocation can be taken from the Latin to form an acrostic in reverse. So the first letters of *Sapientia*, *Adonai*, *Radix*, *Clavis*, *Oriens*, *Rex*, and *Emmanuel*, provide the Latin words: ERO CRAS. The phrase spells out the response of Christ himself to the heartfelt prayer of his people: "Tomorrow I will be there".

In traditional English (Sarum) and hence Anglican usage this pattern was slightly revised and the antiphons began on 16 December rather than 17 December. This resulted in there being one antiphon too few and so a new one, 'O *Virgo*', was added for 23 December.

/continued overleaf

What's in this issue ...

This issue has an Advent/Christmas theme, so you'll find seasonal material on pp3-6 and pp8-9, as well as the usual items:

Conversation with the Editor (pp32-35)
Diary for November-February (pp19-21)
Fellowship News (pp14-17)

From the Superintendent (pp22-24)
Invitations and requests (pp5-7)
News from our Groups (pp12-13)
Music corner (pp37-38)
Partnership news (pp30-31)
Reports on events (pp10-11, 28-29)

/continued from overleaf

However, in the new Church of England Daily Prayer Book the older Roman usage has been restored as it has in our own Daily Prayer Office.

Why not join with the Prayer of the Church each evening, and reflect on these words preparing for Christmas day by day:

17 December – *O Sapientia*

(O Wisdom):

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 and teach us the way of prudence.

18 December – *O Adonai*

(O Lord God)

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 and redeem us with an outstretched arm.

19 December – *O Radix Jesse*

(O Root of Jesse):

O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer: Come and deliver us and delay no longer.

20 December – *O Clavis David*

(O key of David):

O Key of David and sceptre of the House of Israel; you open and no 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.

21 December – *O Oriens*

(O Morning Star):

O Morning Star, splendour of light eternal and sun of righteousness: Come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

22 December – *O Rex Gentium*

(O King of the Nations):

O King of the nations, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one: Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay.

23 December – *O Emmanuel*

(O God with us):

O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver, the hope for the nations and their Saviour: Come and save us, O Lord our God.

Advent Study Group

The Ecumenical Advent Study group will meet in St Columba's Church, Torridon Lane, Rosyth on Mondays **28 November, 12 and 19 December**, and **9 January** at 7.30pm. Come along and join the group, who will be "Journeying with the Magi".

For further information contact Alan Taylor, or Morag Crawford (0131 332 2253)

More Advent reflections

A special series of meetings of the Holy Trinity Prayer Group will be taking place every Tuesday afternoon throughout Advent – on 29 November, and 6, 13 and 20 December – at 2.30pm in the Holy Trinity church hall.

Each meeting is being led by a different person, including Tim and Valerie. Do feel free to join us, either for the whole series or just to dip in, as part of your Advent journey.

If you have any questions or would like more details, please contact Margaret Dineley – margaret.dineley@googlemail.com.