

The Great O Antiphons

As Christmas approaches, feast days – though they are still there – disappear from the Calendar of the Church, as this advanced period of anticipation begins. At the Alleluia at Mass, and the Magnificat antiphon at Evening Prayer, we encounter seven distinctive acclamations known as the 'Great O' antiphons. Each of them (O wisdom, O Lord, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Dayspring, O King of the Nations, and O Emmanuel) speaks to a title of Christ, whose coming is revealed in the Nativity of Jesus. They make clear the vulnerabilities of the human condition and order, and illustrate Christ's loving healing and reconciliation, and the self-sacrificing intention of the Father in sending us the Son. In a period marked with frenetic shopping, cleaning, and premature celebration, we are asked, again (for most of us have done this many times in our life), to wait patiently for the day of the Lord to dawn in splendid humility. O Emmanuel, our king and our lawgiver, the hope of the nations and their Saviour: Come and save us, O Lord our God. (Antiphon from 23rd December.)

Prayers to Remember

Almighty and everlasting God, the Light of the faithful and Ruler of souls, who hast hallowed us by the incarnation of thy Word, and the child-bearing of the Blessed Virgin Mary; we beseech thee, let the power of thy Holy Spirit come also upon us, and the mercy of the Highest overshadow us. Amen.

From The Mozarabic Missal

From the Fathers

'Heaven and earth and men are to join in one concert; Heaven and earth first; Heaven on high, earth beneath to take up one hymn; both in honour of His birth – both are better by it. Heaven has glory, earth peace, by means of it... Warranted by this song, at thy nativity, O Lord, let the heavens rejoice for the glory, let the earth be glad for the peace that come to them by it. And men, though they rest and come in last after both, yet they do it as much... for God's good-will toward them which brought all this to pass in heaven and earth both; restoring men to God's favour and grace, and all by means of this Child.'

Lancelot Andrewes, Sermons of the Nativity: Preached Upon Christmas Day 1619 Before King James

20th December
2020

The Fourth Sunday
of Advent

The Blessed Virgin Mary



In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. And the virgin's name was Mary. (Luke 1.26-27)

Elizabeth has been pregnant for six months when Gabriel is dispatched again from God's presence to bring news of another birth. He's sent to Nazareth, a rather out of the way place, and to the simple dwelling in which Mary is living. What's clear from the opening verses of the meeting of angel and girl is that she has plans: Mary is engaged, and plans are advanced for her – the formalities of the betrothal have taken place, though Joseph has yet to complete the marriage by taking her to his home. Perhaps Mary had clear expectations of what her life would look like with Joseph, and it's difficult for us to understand the depth and cost of her calling.

But maybe we can understand something about plans and expectations that have to be set aside because of a dramatic change in our circumstances. We've all experienced something of that recently, but on a deeper level our own plans can be turned upside down: A new job comes our way and new possibilities open up; a new relationship alters our lives; an illness sets us on a different course. We often find unexpected blessings in these times, and that like Mary we can go on trusting God. Looking back, can you think of times in your life when your plans changed, and can you see how God was with you in those times?.