

NOVENA BEFORE  
**CHRISTMAS**

WRITTEN IN 1721 BY  
FR. VACHETTA

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## Novena before Christmas

Father Charles Vachetta, pastor of the Church of the Immaculate in Turin, Italy, wanted to give his parishioners something special for the Advent of 1721. He wanted them to understand the intertwining of the Old and New Testaments so they could see for themselves the love of God unfold from the beginning of time and for all eternity. Father Vachetta decided to give them the gift of a novena--a prayer going deep into the spirit of Advent, leaving one inspired with inexpressible joy. So Father Vachetta began to write his nine-day prayer, to stir the hearts of his parishioners to eagerly await the coming of Christ.

Father Vachetta was a poet and scholar, steeped in Biblical theology. Using the Latin Vulgate, he wove the novena from the psalms and prophecies of the Old Testament which foretold the coming of the Messiah and crowned his masterpiece by retelling the birth of John the Baptist.

Then, taking some of Scripture's lesser known prophecies, he composed a canticle, or prayer- song of incomparable beauty called "Let the Heavens Be Glad." The canticle is sung after the seven major prophecies and makes a fitting antiphon for the Scripture readings of the day.

The Christmas novena, as it is now known, begins on December 16, nine days before Christmas, and ends on Christmas Eve. Father Vachetta left us the heritage of a lovely Advent tradition and his work continues to prepare hearts for the coming of Christ through the prophecies, psalms and Gospels. His Christmas novena will inspire people for ages to come.

# CHRISTMAS NOVENA

If the novena is led by a priest,  
the Blessed Sacrament is exposed.

## **\*Hymn (Optional)**

(Sung to the melody of "Creator of the Starry Skies")

Behold a thrilling voice calls out  
And chides the darkened shades of earth  
Pale dreams are gone, dim shadows fly  
Christ in his might now shines on high!  
The Lamb of God is sent below Himself to pay the debt we owe.  
O for this gift let every voice With songs and prayers to God rejoice.  
The Blessed Author of our race Took human form to bring us grace  
Lest lost should be those whom he made,  
And he with love our sin repaid.  
And see! with heavenly grace instilled,  
A Mother's loving heart is filled.  
Behold a Virgin's body bears  
The mystery of endless years!  
The Mother makes her spotless breast  
A temple for the child to rest.  
This Virgin loved the Holy One  
And she conceived the Eternal Son.  
To him who comes the world to free,  
To God the Son, all glory be,  
To Father, Maker of us all  
And Holy Spirit, God, we call.

R. Drop down dew from above, you heavens,  
and let the clouds rain the just one.

V. Let the earth be opened and bud forth the Savior.

## Christmas Prophecies

R. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

V. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

Rejoice, Daughter of Sion, and exult Daughter of Jerusalem!

Behold the Lord comes, and there will be a great light in that day, and the mountains shall drop down sweetness. The hills shall flow with milk and honey, for in that day the great prophet will come and he will renew Jerusalem. (cf. Zeph 3:14-18)

R. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

V. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

Behold the God-Man of the house of David will come to sit upon the royal throne and you will see him and your heart will rejoice.

(cf. Jer 23:5-8)

R. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

V. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

The Lord our protector will come, the Holy One of Israel, wearing a crown upon his royal brow. And he will reign from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth. (cf. Is 33:22)

R. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

V. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

The Lord will appear, and he will not deceive; if he should delay, wait for him to come. He will surely come and will not tarry.

(cf. Hab 2:3)

R. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

V. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

The Lord will come down like rain upon the fleece of Gideon. Justice will reign and an abundance of true peace. All the kings of the lands will adore him and every nation will serve him.

(cf. Jdg 6:38; Ps 72:3-4; Is 2:3)

R. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

V. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

A child will be born to us, and he will be called God the almighty; he will sit upon the royal throne of David his father, and he will hold sway, the sign of his power on his shoulder. (cf. Is 9:6-7)

R. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

V. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

Bethlehem, city of the Most High God, from you will come forth the king of Israel, and he will proceed forth from his eternity and he will be greatly praised in the midst of the entire universe. And there will be peace in our land when he will have come. (cf. Mic 5:2-5)

R. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

V. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

(To be recited on Dec 24<sup>th</sup>)

Tomorrow the wickedness of the whole world will be destroyed, and over us will reign the Savior of the world.

R. Our Lord and king is drawing near; O come let us adore him!

V. Near at last is Christ our king; O come let us adore him!

# Let the Heavens Be Glad

(Canticle or song-prayer)

Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice,  
O all you mountains praise the Lord.  
Drop down dew from above you heavens,  
And let the clouds rain the just one.

Let the earth be opened,  
And bud forth the Savior!  
Remember us, O Lord,  
And visit us in your salvation.

Show your mercy to us, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.  
Send forth, O Lord, the Lamb, the ruler of the earth,  
from the rock in the desert to the Mount of Sion.

Come to free us, O Lord God of hosts; show your face  
and we shall be saved.  
Come, O Lord, and visit us in peace,  
so that we may rejoice before you with a perfect heart.  
May we know on earth, O Lord, your way,  
your salvation among all nations.

Put forth, O Lord, your strength, and come to save us.  
Come, O Lord, and do not hesitate; pardon the sins of your people.  
O that you would rend the heavens and come down,  
the mountains would melt in your presence.

Come and show us your face, O Lord, you who sit upon the cherubim.

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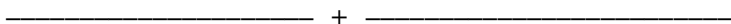
Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit;  
as it was in the beginning, is now and will be forever. Amen.

Let us pray:

Christ the Lamb, who existed before time, in time, and exists for all time, will come to us again. He has been made high priest forever. He is the true king of justice and his reign will have no end.

**R. Drop down dew from above, you heavens,  
and let the clouds rain the just one.**

**V. Let the earth be opened and bud forth the Savior.**



## Explanation of the "O Antiphons"

From December 17 to 23, the liturgy uses seven short prayers that have special richness and importance. Known as the "O antiphons" or the "greater antiphons," these prayers compress and express the Old Testament Messianic hope for Christ.

These antiphons are read each day at vespers and are used as the alleluia verse of the Advent Masses. Each antiphon is a mosaic of biblical references, collected and written in a style called anthological. The unknown author of these beautiful prayers lived around the sixth or seventh century. The author chose seven titles whose first letters are S-A-R-C-O-R-E. Read in reverse order, these letters form two Latin words *ero cras*, meaning "Tomorrow I shall be."

*Note: In this edition we are using a poetic translation of the "O antiphons" from the original Latin.*

## December 16

And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant-- these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. (Is 56:6-7)

## **Consideration**

Advent prepares our minds and hearts for the coming of the Word of God. It is a gentle time, a time to watch that the word of Scripture does not fall on the rocky ground of distraction, nor by the wayside with our many cares, nor among thorns, caught up in flashy advertisements. It is to fall upon the rich soil of our minds and hearts where the Word of God can bury itself deep and bring forth fruit. The Lord is already near! Let us admit that we need his power and help. Come, Lord Jesus! Give us the gift of yourself.

## **Antiphon**

Behold the king will come, the Lord of the earth, and he will remove from us the yoke of our captivity. (cf. Hab 2:3; 1 Cor 4:5)

## **Magnificat**

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for

the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

## **Intercessions**

Jesus, light of the world, we wait in darkness, but also in hope for your coming;

—show yourself to us in mercy and love.

Lord of Israel, you showed yourself to Moses in a burning bush;

—stretch forth your mighty arm and come to save us.

Jesus, born of Mary, we pray with joyful hearts and wait with her in prayer;

—come, Adonai!

Jesus, life of our bodies and souls,

—by your coming let us be immersed in the mystery of your incarnation.

## **Closing Prayer**

Christ goes before us. He is the Lamb without sin who will open to us the gates of heaven. He is the high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech. He is the king of justice and his reign is eternal.

## **December 17**

Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob; listen to Israel your father. Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the

neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness-- who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his.

(Gen 49:2, 8-10)

## Consideration

When we read Scripture and yearn for the coming of the divine, powerful Wisdom who will teach us how to live throughout our life, we think of Mary, the humble Mother of God who always waited upon the Lord as his handmaid. Let us pray: Father, you spoke, and your Word became man, born of the Virgin Mary. Christ humbled himself to share our human nature. We humble ourselves before the child and ask for faith and love.

## Antiphon

O Wisdom eternal, proceeding from the mouth of the Most High, you reach from end to end and order all things mightily and sweetly; come now to direct us in the way of holy prudence.  
(cf. Sir 24; Wis 6-9)

## Magnificat

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his

name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

## **Intercessions**

Christ our Redeemer, your law is a light to our path;

--teach us always to walk in the light of your law.

Coming Savior, dawn on us in radiant beauty,

--so that we may receive you with loving devotion at your birth.

God of Jacob, you desire that all might be saved;

--bring all people safely into the kingdom of heaven.

Lord of nations, show us your glory and give us true faith and love;

--protect us from harm and let us live in peace with each other.

Lord of ages, you desired to become one like us;

--may the revelation of your humanity free us from our sinfulness.

## **Closing Prayer**

Christ goes before us. He is the Lamb without sin who will open to us the gates of heaven. He is the high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech. He is the king of justice and his reign is eternal.

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## **December 18**

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his

days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness."

Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, "As the Lord lives who brought the people of Israel up out of the land of Egypt," but "As the Lord lives who brought out and led the offspring of the house of Israel out of the land of the north and out of all the lands where he had driven them." Then they shall live in their own land. (Jer 23:5-8)

## **Consideration**

God of Israel, you appeared to Moses in the burning bush. You delivered the Israelites from bondage in Egypt by parting the sea, and blessed your people with a covenant as a bridegroom marries his bride. Redeeming Lord, come to save us from the folly of our sins. Give us the blessing of a new covenant written in our hearts for all times. Rescue us with your mighty power!

## **Antiphon**

O Lord and leader of the house of Israel, who once appeared to Moses and spoke to him from a bush aflame, and on the peak of Sinai gave him the law; come now, bring us your redemption with your mighty outstretched arm. (cf. Ex 3, 15, 24; Deut 5)

## **Magnificat**

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his

name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

## **Intercessions**

Light of the world, dispel our darkness,

--and make us worthy of your coming.

Key of David, unlock the mystery of your incarnation for all people,

--so that all humanity may praise you together in loving joy.

Eternal Son, let your face shine upon the sick,

--so they may serve you worthily in their infirmity.

Son of David, remember all those who are to die today,

--and bring them into your perfect light.

## **Closing Prayer**

Christ goes before us. He is the Lamb without sin who will open to us the gates of heaven. He is the high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech. He is the king of justice and his reign is eternal.

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## **December 19**

In the days of King Herod of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly order of Abijah. His wife was a descendant of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. Both of

them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were getting on in years.

Once when he was serving as priest before God and his section was on duty, he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense. Now at the time of the incense offering, the whole assembly of the people was praying outside. Then there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

When Zechariah saw him, he was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord." (Lk 1:5-14)

### **Consideration**

The infant king will stand as a sign in full view of all the nations. This king will be a sign not only for the Israelites, but also for the Gentiles. All people shall come to him. Our hearts call out, "Come Lord, save your people, do not delay, for we are ready to receive you; we desire to see you face to face."

### **Antiphon**

O root of Jesse, standing an ensign of the people, before whom even kings silent will remain, whom the Gentiles, too, shall beseech, come now to deliver us all; delay no longer. (cf. Is 11)

### **Magnificat**

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to

generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

## **Intercessions**

Son of Man, may we celebrate your birth, you who are the Lamb of God;

--you take away our sins and the sins of the world.

Son of Mary, while in your Mother's womb you were welcomed by Elizabeth and her infant son, John;

--though hidden, may we always recognize you and welcome you into our hearts.

God our Counselor, come; tell us that your kingdom is at hand;

--protect the Church and the Pope. Keep the Church as your spotless bride.

Root of Jesse, you humbled yourself to share our human nature;

--come and save us without delay.

## **Closing Prayer**

Christ goes before us. He is the Lamb without sin who will open to us the gates of heaven. He is the high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech. He is the king of justice and his reign is eternal.

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## **December 20**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name

was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be.

The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?"

The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her. Lk 1:26-38)

## **Consideration**

The original reference for the fourth "O antiphon" is Isaiah, chapter 22. "Key of David" refers to the one with authority over the royal house of David.

The antiphon begs Christ to come and unlock the doors for his

people who sit in religious darkness and in the shadows of death. We must wait with longing for our Lord. Mary's fiat--her total acceptance of God's will--brings us the glimmer of light and hope for the coming of Emmanuel, God among us. Mary carries the key of David who will free us forever. Hail, full of grace!

## **Antiphon**

O key of David, royal scepter of Israel, you who open and no one closes; who close and no one can open, come now, and free humanity from its bonds in prison, where it sits in darkness and the shadow of death. (cf. Is 22; Rev 3:7)

## **Magnificat**

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

## **Intercessions**

Adonai! Son of the living God! The day of the Lord draws near;  
--he comes as the one who is to save us through his suffering, death

and resurrection.

Virgin Mary, Mother of the Savior, we wait with you quietly for the birth of your Son,

--who will set us free from ignorance and darkness.

Virgin Mother, you placed yourself at God's service and conceived his Son first in your heart, then in your womb;

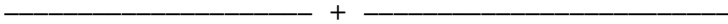
--show us how to open our hearts and receive your Son, for we have a deep bond with you, Christ's Mother and our Mother, too.

Mary, our Mother, give doctors and nurses strength to bring their patients to health,

--that the ill might know the joy of good care in their infirmities.

## Closing Prayer

Christ goes before us. He is the Lamb without sin who will open to us the gates of heaven. He is the high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech. He is the king of justice and his reign is eternal.



## December 21

In those days Mary set out and went with haste to a Judean town in the hill country, where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the child

leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And why has this happened to me, that the mother of my Lord comes to me? For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (Lk 1:39- 45)

## **Consideration**

Mary and Elizabeth were deeply rooted in faith and love of God, and both responded wholeheartedly to God's plans. They are a sublime sign of hope for the whole human race. Families all over the world look to their example as they await the blessing of a new baby in their own homes. May they build a foundation of love for the child to come and correspond with joy to God's plans. Mary, the Morning Star, heralds the coming of her Son; Elizabeth is the first to understand. Her own son leaps for joy in her womb, and the two women embrace because God is in their midst.

## **Antiphon**

O radiant dawn, splendor of eternal light and bright sun of justice, come now and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. (cf. Zech 3:8; 6:12; Is 9:2; 60:1-3; Wis 7:26; Lk 1:78; Heb 1:3)

## **Magnificat**

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered <sup>20</sup>

the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

## **Intercessions**

Ruler of Jacob's house, teach us to guard what is good in ourselves, --that we may cherish all that you have given to us, for you are our salvation.

God of power and might, help us to be patient and steady our hearts, because the coming of the Lord is at hand;

--drop down dew from above and let the clouds rain down the just one.

Lord, the one foretold by the prophets,

--be mindful of your promises to Abraham and his children.

Messiah, king of glory, you are the fulfillment of the Scriptures,

--grant that all people may recognize you as their Savior and Lord.

## **Closing Prayer**

Christ goes before us. He is the Lamb without sin who will open to us the gates of heaven. He is the high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech. He is the king of justice and his reign is eternal.

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## **December 22**

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his

servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

## Consideration

In the Magnificat, Mary draws on the Old Testament prophecies and exults in praise of God. Mary's Son is destined to fulfill God's promises to his people. Mary rejoices in the deliverance of God's people and in his care for the poor and destitute of society. Her song bears another hymn that runs like a golden thread through the readings and antiphons. The expected Messiah will be the Lord of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews. We pray in today's antiphon, "Come, king of all nations." Christ is the peacemaker, the bond of unity among all peoples.

## Antiphon

O king of all nations, the one for whom they have been yearning,

the cornerstone who unites all of them in perfect union, come now,  
and rescue poor humanity, which from dust you have fashioned.  
(cf. Jer 10:7; Hg 2:8; Is 28:16, Gen 2:7, Eph 2:14)

## **Magnificat**

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

## **Intercessions**

Wonderful, Counselor, Prince of Peace! In your great love for us you were born of the Virgin Mary;

--may her prayers for us be our joy and consolation at all times.

Mary has given birth to the Savior, splendor of the rising sun;

--bring those who have died into your light through the intercession of Mary your Mother.

The angels proclaim a mystery today while shepherds hurry to a cave. Mary has given birth to a child in a cold, bare stable;

--we are ready to warm you, holy child, with our hearts. Let us honor you by our lives and deeds, singing glory to God in the highest and peace to all people of goodwill.

Christ, Emmanuel, Mary cared for you in joy and Joseph provided for all the needs of his family;

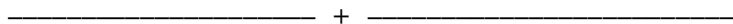
--help families to love one another and bond them together in love.

Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you! Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb;

--truly blessed is she who bore the Son of God, and blessed too are those who hear the word of God--and keep it.

## Closing Prayer

Christ goes before us. He is the Lamb without sin who will open to us the gates of heaven. He is the high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech. He is the king of justice and his reign is eternal



## December 23

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight--indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them

like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse. (Mal 3:1-4; 4:5-6)

## **Consideration**

Malachi prophesies the birth and mission of John the Baptist. Like a new Elijah, John will go before the Messiah and prepare the people for the Lord's coming. A spirit of joy and wonderment pervades today's prophecy, for the hand of God is active in Israel. The people wonder what it will all mean for their future. What does it mean for us today? The seventh "O antiphon" climaxes the series. The Messiah is addressed in human form. He is asked to remain with us as Emmanuel. May our hearts be ready to receive the Lord into our small, personal world, as he once came to the little town of Bethlehem. Emmanuel--God is with us! God, stay with us.

## **Antiphon**

O Emmanuel, our ruler and lawgiver, the expected of the nations and the Redeemer of all, come now to deliver us, O our Lord and our master. (cf. Is 7:14; Is 33:22; Gen 49:10; Zech 9:9; Jn 20:28)

## **Magnificat**

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has

helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

## **Intercessions**

King of kings, direct the minds and hearts of those who hold authority;

--let justice and peace prevail and let goodwill reign forever.

Lord Jesus, through your saving grace and power,

--may your Church continue to spread until it embraces every nation.

Jesus, prince of peace, you are meek and humble of heart;

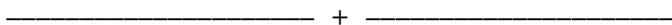
--teach us to be thankful for all the blessings you bestow upon us.

Jesus, source of light and growth, increase vocations in your Church, like a gentle rain falling upon the earth;

--the harvest is great and your word must be announced through all the world until your kingdom comes.

## **Closing Prayer**

Christ goes before us. He is the Lamb without sin who will open to us the gates of heaven. He is the high priest forever according to the order of Melchisedech. He is the king of justice and his reign is eternal.



## **December 24**

And Mary remained with her about three months and then returned to her home.

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness until the day he appeared publicly to Israel.  
(Lk 1:56; 67-80)

## **Consideration**

Come, O Lord, for the whole world breathlessly waits for your birth. This one happy moment contains all ages--past, present and future--bonding eternal peace between heaven and earth through a newborn child. We bow in adoration and joy. In calm and peace we look into ourselves and present to the infant our thoughts and sentiments.

Lord, today your goodness overflows and a branch springs forth from the root of Jesse. The bud of salvation unfolds itself from the Virgin's womb in the dead of winter. The seed entrusted to earth breaks forth in our cold, frozen hearts and warms them with the presence of God in human form.

## **Antiphon**

O Emmanuel, our ruler and lawgiver, the expected of the nations and the Redeemer of all, come now to deliver us, O our Lord and our master.

## **Magnificat**

My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name. His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:46-55)

## **Intercessions**

Father of the Word made flesh, bring us joy and peace;

--help us to live united in respect and love for each other.

We await the coming of your Son,

--for you are faithful to your promises of salvation and eternal life.

May we prepare ourselves for the birth of your Son,

--by meditating upon your word.

Through the Word made flesh may we learn to love each other,  
--so Christ will find all of us waiting for him in joyful prayer at the  
Second Coming.

Adonai, God of love and mercy, help us follow the example of  
Mary,

--who believed the angel, hastened to help Elizabeth, and  
welcomed your Son in a cold, bare stable, warming him only with  
her exceeding love.

## **Closing Prayer**

Let us pray. Come to live among us, Lord, so that we may always  
receive your forgiveness and mercy. Jesus our king, clothed in a  
robe of flesh, give us love, wisdom and understanding at your birth.  
Reveal to us the mystery of your life, then send us forth to reveal  
your Word over all the earth.

You who live and reign with God the Father in the unity of the Holy  
Spirit, world without end. Amen.

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