

Count down to Christmas with an O Antiphons paper chain

“How many days until Christmas?” This is an almost-daily question from our 7-year-old, who is probably at the peak of that childhood experience of the magic of Christmas. Of course, he’s mainly interested in presents, special food (candy!), and “screen time all day!” (not quite, but we’re less strict about it). That’s fine, but at the same time, we want to keep gently nudging him in the direction of Jesus.

One way we’ve done this is by creating a simple paper chain that he can use to count down the days until Christmas. We’ve made one link for each day until Christmas, the idea being that he will break off a link every day and then count how many days we have to go.

But we’ve put a little twist on this simple craft by writing the O Antiphons on the inside of the links. In the seven days leading up to Christmas Eve, we’ll open each link to discover a new antiphon—and, if all goes according to plan, have a short conversation about what it means. Who knows, if all goes well, we might even incorporate them into our family prayer by praying each antiphon together, then reciting the Magnificat, then praying the antiphon again, which is how it’s done in the Divine Office.

This craft is so simple, you can probably take it from here, but for the crafty challenged (*me! me!*), see below for details on how we made our “countdown to Christmas” chain using gift wrap. Or, scroll down even farther to learn more about the O Antiphons, and to get the text.

Make an O Antiphon Countdown to Christmas Paper Chain

Materials:

- Christmas gift wrap, preferably several different kinds, and preferably the heavier, more expensive type; alternatively, use colored construction paper or white paper that your child decorates herself
- scissors
- glue stick or cellophane tape
- pen or marker



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1. Cut strips of paper about one inch wide and approximately 11-12 inches long. If you use gift wrap, cut a long strip crosswise, then cut that down into shorter strips.
2. Copy the words of each O Antiphon onto the strips of paper; you may want to include the date that each O Antiphon is said so that you can more easily place them in the right order later. For Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, you might want to write a special message, since there are no antiphons for those days.
3. Make the links of the chain by fastening the ends of each strip of paper, using a glue stick or tape. Be sure to put the O Antiphons in their proper order!

4. Hang the O Antiphon chain on your Advent tree, or in another appropriate place (maybe the door of your child's room?). Beginning December 17, let your child remove one link of the chain every day. Read the antiphon together, and use it during your family prayer. The Divine Office calls for reading or chanting the antiphon, then reciting the Magnificat, then reading or chanting the antiphon again.



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How can you expand or elaborate on this craft?

- Make a really long Christmas countdown chain for the whole season of Advent. Look up the readings for each day prior to the beginning of the O Antiphons and choose a word or phrase to use inside the link, or use the Gospel antiphon.
- You can pretty up your links by folding the strips of paper lengthwise and cutting small holes in them, paper snowflake style. Be sure to write the inside message first, and keep the holes small so the text isn't unreadable.
- Extend your paper chain into the whole Christmas season.

What Are the O Antiphons?

The O Antiphons are an ancient liturgical antiphon (response) sung or recited during the last seven days of Advent (one each day from December 17 through December 23) as part of the

Liturgy of Hours. (The Liturgy of Hours is the way the Church prays throughout the day.)

No one knows the exact origin of the O Antiphons, but Christians have been singing them since at least the fifth century. You might recognize some of the words, because the O Antiphons are the basis of the popular hymn O Come, O Come Emmanuel.

Each antiphon begins with a title of Christ taken from the Old Testament, mostly from the prophet Isaiah. We hear many of these titles in the daily readings during the weeks leading up to Christmas.

The O Antiphons

December 17

O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High,
reaching from one end to the other,
mighty and sweetly ordering all things:
Come and teach us the way of prudence.

December 18

O Lord, 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.

December 19

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.

December 20

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,

December 21

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

December 22

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

December 23

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