

O Wisdom
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This Friday, December 17th, begins the church's annual trek through a historic set of prayers that the ancient church used in the Vespers service during the seven days leading up to Christmas. These antiphons are the basis of the much beloved hymn, "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel." The Great "O" Antiphons stir up wonderful ponderings as we journey to the incarnation of our Savior.

For December 17th:

O Wisdom, proceeding from the mouth of the Most High, pervading and permeating all creation, mightily ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.

When I consider this antiphon, two questions come to mind:
What is Wisdom?
and
What is the way of prudence?

First, Wisdom. In *Lutheran Service Book: Companion to the Hymns*, Rev. Dr. Charles Gieschen calls readers to consider Proverbs 8 when pondering O Wisdom in this antiphon. From this text we see "O Wisdom" as a name for Christ.

I, wisdom, dwell with prudence,
and I find knowledge and discretion. . . .
The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His work,
the first of His acts of old.
Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,
before He had made the earth with its fields,
or the first of the dust of the world.
When He established the heavens, I was there;
when He drew a circle on the face of the deep,
when He made firm the skies above,
when He established the fountains of the deep,
when He assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress His command,
when He marked out the foundations of the earth,
then I was beside Him, like a master workman,
and I was daily His delight,
rejoicing before Him always,

rejoicing in His inhabited world
and delighting in the children of man.
(Proverbs 8:12, 22–31)

So, if Wisdom in this Antiphon is Christ, then what is this “way of prudence?” If we go back to the beginning of Proverbs, we will find a definition of the prudence coming from Wisdom.

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

To know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight,
to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;
to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,
to understand a proverb and a saying,
the words of the wise and their riddles.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.
(Proverbs 1:1–7)

Rev. Dr. Andrew Steinmann expounds on this outpouring from wisdom in his *Concordia Commentary* on Proverbs, stating that the concepts of wisdom in Proverbs are threefold: knowledge, discipline, and spiritual growth. Knowledge is knowing that you are known by God and He has placed His name on you. Discipline is taking the actions God has given us that are good and true. Finally, spiritual growth is continuing in these concepts and growing in your knowledge and discipline. One might even call this sanctification.

So this Friday, as you pray this antiphon, you might even hear it in a modern way:

O Christ, preceding from the mouth of the Father, filling and spreading through all creation, mightily ordering all things: Come and teach us now that we have Your name on our foreheads, to delight in and do Your words, and to sanctify us on the way.