



# The Epiphany Antiphons 2021

ACCOMPANYING THE REVISED COMMON LECTIONARY FROM  
EPIPHANY TO LENT

Vince Gilbert

## WHY?

2020 has been a terrible year for most of us. Even if the pandemic hasn't touched us personally, it has transformed our lives and shaken our foundations.

Just before Christmas, a friend threw a question out on Facebook. "I was wondering what contemporary versions of the "O Antiphons" (as in O come, O come Immanuel) i.e. expressions of lament and longing would look like." It got me thinking, and this is the result.

The traditional antiphons, composed in Latin, are some 15 centuries old. (If you want to know more, start with Wikipedia.) They were said or sung during Advent, usually accompanying recitations of the Magnificat. Each one calls Christ by a different name (O Wisdom, O Emmanuel, and so on) by which, many Christians believe, they can recognise him as he is prefigured in the Book of Isaiah. Each of the seven texts then illustrates what that means in practice, and calls on him to come and, crucially, to act in the contemporary world.

They are cries of longing to God from people who know that it is not God's will that the world should be the way it is.

It was too late to do anything for Advent 2020. But the ten days starting just before Christmas Day have revealed to us that, not only is the hope of a vaccine beginning to be fulfilled, but that, before that hope is realized, the "new variant" of the disease will make the next few months at least as terrible as the weeks of Lent and Easter 2020, when we lost so many friends.

These cries of hope and longing are the result.

Vince Gilbert

New Year's Eve 2020

Lectionary selections are reprinted from Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings copyright © 2005. Consultation on Common Texts, Augsburg Fortress Publishers.

Scripture texts are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA. All rights reserved.

## HOW THEY WORK

There are nine antiphons. There is one each for the Feasts of Epiphany (January 6<sup>th</sup>) and the Presentation in the Temple (February 2<sup>nd</sup>, also called Candlemas), and also one for each of the Sundays between Epiphany and Ash Wednesday on 17<sup>th</sup> February, which is the beginning of Lent.

The images and ideas in each one are drawn from the lessons in the Revised Common Lectionary – Old Testament, Psalm, New Testament and Gospel. They are designed to be read out loud, if that is practical.

Each antiphon consists of four lines. It opens with a name used in one of those readings to describe either God the Father or God the Son, then uses imagery from throughout those readings to describe how that name plays out in the world. It concludes by asking God to come and fulfil the promise that that name implies.

You could simply use them as prayers on their appointed day, to express the rage, desperation and hope of the People of God at current events. That would, perhaps, be simplest if time is short.

As they are both a reflection on the set readings, and a commentary on the Gospel, try reading them alongside the Gospel itself. Or maybe twice, once before and once after, allowing time to let the texts speak to you.

As antiphons, their traditional use would be to say them in public worship (there is neither time nor skill to prepare music for singing them) both before and after the reading of the Gospel for the day. This parallels the use of the traditional Advent antiphons, on which their form is loosely based: to point out particular features of the Scripture itself, as a commentary and reflection which is given in the liturgy to people who aren't the main Gospel-reader.

Finally, as pieces written for this year, my aim has been to address the tendency for both in-person and online services of worship to be simplified and shortened – as recommended on public health grounds for in-person services and on communication grounds for online. Well, at least some national churches have recommended that. I've noticed a tendency to drop "secondary" Bible readings in favour of a single, dominating Scripture, with the risk of losing some of the depth and texture that comes from the juxtaposition of up to four readings in conversation with each other. My hope is that, since all four readings are referenced almost every time, some at least of that richness of worship can be retained, even in the necessarily attenuated services of these days.

Each antiphon is headed with the references for the four readings, and followed by the NRSV text of the Gospel.

## FEAST OF THE EPIPHANY

6<sup>th</sup> January

[Isaiah 60:1-6](#)

[Psalm 72:1-7, 10-14](#)

[Ephesians 3:1-12](#)

[Matthew 2:1-12](#)

O First of All, the source of all that is,

Fountain of all creation in a manger,

In whose name sick are healed, poor sheltered, hungry fed:

Come, King of Righteousness; receive our tribute too.

### **Matthew 2:1-12**

2:1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem,

2:2 asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

2:3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him;

2:4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

2:5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

2:6 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

2:7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

2:8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

2:9 When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

2:10 When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

2:11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

2:12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

## FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY (BAPTISM OF JESUS)

10<sup>th</sup> January

[Genesis 1:1-5](#)

[Psalm 29](#)

[Acts 19:1-7](#)

[Mark 1:4-11](#)

O Creator of all light and of all dark,  
Whose holiness blessed all created things in Jordan water,  
Beloved, coming to a world abused, diseased, in pain:  
Come, hands that heal, that guide; raise us upright, and help us live.

### **Mark 1:4-11**

1:4 John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

1:5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

1:6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey.

1:7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals.

1:8 I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

1:9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

1:10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him.

1:11 And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

## SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

17<sup>th</sup> January

<a href="#"><u>1 Samuel 3:1-10, (11-20)</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Psalm 139:1-6, 13-18</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>1 Corinthians 6:12-20</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>John 1:43-51</u></a>
---	---	--	-------------------------------------

O Seer into souls that sleep in darkness, Voice who calls 'Awake!'

Who sees past what is lawful, prudent, duteous, constrained,

Who knows; and knowing, loves; and loving, sets ablaze:

Come speak, and spark; ignite the tinder of dry hearts.

### **John 1:43-51**

1:43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."

1:44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

1:45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

1:46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

1:47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!"

1:48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you."

1:49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

1:50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."

1:51 And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

## THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

24<sup>th</sup> January

<a href="#"><u>Jonah 3:1-5, 10</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Psalm 62:5-12</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>1 Corinthians 7:29-31</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Mark 1:14-20</u></a>
--	--------------------------------------	--	-------------------------------------

O Preacher of Good News, declaring holy revolution,  
Who founds a People using common folk who'll hear,  
Calls those who'll wait through troubles, take no trust in wealth, or might, or power:  
Come now and heal us; summon us, and make us yours.

### **Mark 1:14-20**

1:14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God,

1:15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

1:16 As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea--for they were fishermen.

1:17 And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people."

1:18 And immediately they left their nets and followed him.

1:19 As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets.

1:20 Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

## FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

31<sup>st</sup> January

<a href="#"><u>Deuteronomy 18:15-20</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Psalm 111</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>1 Corinthians 8:1-13</u></a>	<a href="#"><u>Mark 1:21-28</u></a>
---	----------------------------------	---	-------------------------------------

O Holy One, who strips authority from all our gods,  
From all whose falsehoods cloud our minds  
With malice, greed, self-righteousness and pride:  
Come, blaze with kindly grace; burn off the mists, and help us see.

### **Mark 1:21-28**

1:21 They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.

1:22 They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

1:23 Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit,

1:24 and he cried out, "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God."

1:25 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be silent, and come out of him!"

1:26 And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him.

1:27 They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, "What is this? A new teaching--with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."

1:28 At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.



## PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE (CANDLEMAS)

2<sup>nd</sup> February

<u>Malachi 3:1-4</u>	<u>Psalm 84</u> <b>or</b> <u>Psalm 24:7-10</u>	<u>Hebrews 2:14-18</u>	<u>Luke 2:22-40</u>
----------------------	--	------------------------	---------------------

O Death-destroyer, freeing all death's slaves,

Tested by suffering, one of us and priest of mercy:

Come soon; lift up the gates, and grant your servants room

To lodge within the City of the Lamb.

### **Luke 2:22-40**

2:22 When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord

2:23 (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"),

2:24 and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

2:25 Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

2:26 It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

2:27 Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law,

2:28 Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying,

2:29 "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word;

2:30 for my eyes have seen your salvation,

2:31 which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

2:32 a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

2:33 And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

2:34 Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed

2:35 so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

2:36 There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage,

2:37 then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.

2:38 At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

2:39 When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

2:40 The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

## FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

7<sup>th</sup> February

[Isaiah 40:21-31](#)

[Psalm 147:1-11, 20c](#)

[1 Corinthians 9:16-23](#)

[Mark 1:29-39](#)

O Healer of the humble, Silencer of fears,  
Who raises up the beaten grass-stems, binds our wounds,  
Who speaks the names of every star and misses not a one:  
Come, as a rushing eagle; bring the rescue of Good News.

### **Mark 1:29-39**

1:29 As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John.

1:30 Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once.

1:31 He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.

1:32 That evening, at sundown, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons.

1:33 And the whole city was gathered around the door.

1:34 And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.

1:35 In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed.

1:36 And Simon and his companions hunted for him.

1:37 When they found him, they said to him, "Everyone is searching for you."

1:38 He answered, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."

1:39 And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

## SUNDAY BEFORE LENT (TRANSFIGURATION)

14<sup>th</sup> February

[2 Kings 2:1-12](#)

[Psalm 50:1-6](#)

[2 Corinthians 4:3-6](#)

[Mark 9:2-9](#)

O Son, Beloved One, whose home  
Is heights and depths, beyond the limits of the First and Last,  
Who cured the madness of a world diseased:  
Come here, where you are always; make salvation known.

### **Mark 9:2-9**

9:2 Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,

9:3 and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.

9:4 And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

9:5 Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

9:6 He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

9:7 Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

9:8 Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

9:9 As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.