

*Reflections of
O Antiphons
for
Military Families*



About This Guide

O Antiphons have a rich tradition in the celebration of Advent, dating back to at least the eighth century. Using biblical imagery found in the Old Testament to point to the coming of the Messiah, Christ the King, the antiphons accompany the "Magnificat" canticle of the Evening Prayers from December 17-23.**

This guide was written to delve deeper into these timeless antiphons and prayers as we come closer to the coming of our Savior. This particular guide allows MCCW members to spiritually reflect on certain elements of our military culture, and use the O Antiphons to build a staging ground for deeper spiritual rejuvenation as we approach Christmas.

Each O Antiphon is separated into four distinct categories:

The Traditional O Antiphon (taken from the USCCB website)

This particular category displays the date to be read, and is the traditional prayer in which we turn to God, reminding ourselves of His coming as God made Man.

Reflection

This particular section addresses topics pertinent to our military culture. It highlights moments upon which to reflect - by either seeing ourselves and our lives in the written component, or by recognizing other women we may know. It is meant to allow a deeper reflection on the ways to carry our Catholic witness to those around us, and allow us to be Christ's hands to others.

Intentions

As Philippians 4:13 states, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." We understand and appreciate prayer forms the basis of all our work as Catholic Christians, and each intention built into the daily reflections are based on the reflection, and tied into our military culture.

Bible Verse

This particular section of the guide allows the reader to further reflect on an element of the antiphon and the reflection by reminding the reader of the Biblical roots of our Catholic Christian heritage. Tying into the reflection and inflections, it is meant to continue enhancing the reader's journey through this Advent tradition of celebrating the O Antiphons.

December 17: O wisdom of our God Most High, guiding creation with power and love: come to teach us the path of knowledge!

Reflection

The military lifestyle is fraught with uncertainty. Too often, Servicemembers and their families face moves to new cities or states, and even sometimes to foreign countries. So much is out of our control, and that lack of uncertainty can be difficult to handle at times. Most times, we seek as much certainty as we can get - trying to gain a small semblance of control in our lives through our questions and answers of those more experienced at this game of military life. We those who are senior to us, those closest to us, and those in a position to "know" the answers to our questions. It can be easy for us to overlook the contribution of God and His plans, as we try to make sense of yet another unplanned change to our family life, based on the needs of the military.

However, God our Most High has the knowledge of His plan for every single one of us, including each and every family in our Armed Forces. While we may not have perfect insight, we are asked to trust in His plan, His goodness, and His knowledge. In the midst of uncertainty, the middle of a change of plans, the surprise of new orders, He has a plan for us - and, asks us to rest in His plan, trusting He is in charge and has our best interests at heart.

Intentions

May we rest in the knowledge our God loves us, knows us, and has great plans for every single one of us;

May we remember to turn to Him, especially during times of doubt, and lay our fears, our worries, and our uncertainties at His feet - asking Him to comfort us in our times of need;

May we always remember that God uses us for His purpose, and sometimes it is to help another family facing its own uncertainty. May we remember to be Christ's hands and for those experiencing fear or doubt in the unknown, and help allay those feelings whenever we are able.

Bible Verse

Proverbs 2:6

For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.



December 18: O Leader of the House of Israel, giver of the Law to Moses on Sinai: come to rescue us with Your mighty power!

Reflection

Rules and regulations are par for the course in our military culture. Add in moving away from families and friends, changes in seasons of life, and changes in career progression, we can easily begin to withdraw - instead, drawing within ourselves. Before we realize it, we may find ourselves isolated, lonely, and without connection with others outside the walls of our own homes. It is important for each of us to recognize when we are beginning to withdraw, and take steps to reach out. It is also important to welcome the new face at our Catholic community chapels, in our women's groups, or within our military neighborhoods.

God created us for relationships, and we find the ultimate example of relationship within the Holy Family. Setting aside the numerous rules and regulations which may govern our Servicemember, seeing the person - the individual - sitting next to us, we have the ability to put into practice the three rheological virtues of Faith (in each other, ourselves, and our God), Hope (that we will be able to make a difference in the life of another), and Charity (being Christ's hands to another person who may be withdrawing). Looking past the outer facade many of us try to present, and embracing the individual woman who may be struggling is one integral way of building camaraderie among our unique community. It is also living the example of love as given to us by our Holy Family.

Intentions

May we be open to being God's hands by extending ourselves to another in friendship;

May we always be looking for a way to greet the newest member of our Catholic community, and when needed, ask God to give us the courage to reach out and approach another person;

May we remember to pray for our leaders and those involved in setting rules and regulations - that they constantly keep the individual and the individual's needs in minds and hearts as policies are created.

Bible Verse

Isaiah 40: 28-31

Have you not known? Have you not heard? the Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.



December 19: O Root of Jesse's stem, sign of God's love for all his people: come to save us without delay!

Reflection

The military is perhaps the most diverse employer in the world. Every single woman brings her own life experience to the military culture and family. We all create the foundation - the roots - of the beautiful community known as the military. Working together, through the winds of change and uncertainty, we create the most beautiful, stable tree in the forest of this world.

Not every woman recognizes her own talents and gifts. However, with support from the people standing next to them, pointing out her strengths, most women are able to embrace how their own life experiences, gifts, and perspectives shape the woman they have become. By embracing our life experiences, we are able to create a strong, well-rounded community, filled with empathy and understanding of others.

Honoring each others' perspectives, histories, and experiences, we create an unbreakable tree, stemming from the depths of our roots.

Intentions

May we seek to always recognize the individual gifts, qualities, and experience the person standing next to us brings to the table;

When possible, may we strive to bring the best out of those who don't yet recognize their own gifts and life experiences;

May we harness our own individual potential to put to use for the betterment of our Catholic communities and our military communities - embracing diversity of those around us, and embracing our own contribution to the military family team.

Bible Verse

Isaiah 11:1-2

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding; the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.



December 20: O Key of David, opening the gates of God's eternal Kingdom: come and free the prisoners of darkness!

Reflection

Our military community is full of individuals offering gifts and abilities. Often, our lifestyle also presents unique challenges to those who carry crosses - whether they are physical, emotional, or spiritual. In carrying the burden of our individual crosses, we can quickly become discouraged, and sometimes feel hopeless.

Our crosses may be something visible to the eye, or can be invisible - perhaps even a wound we are ashamed to speak about to others. Sometimes, we want to speak about our crosses, to ask someone to play the role of Simon of Cyrene, and help us carry that burden; but, we don't know how to explain the weight of the cross we are carrying. Other times, we embrace the offer of others to assist, and still feel heavily burdened at the end of each day. Sometimes, those best equipped to help us are in other parts of the world, or only available to communicate when they can reach out to us, which creates an added burden of loneliness.

God, in His infinite wisdom and goodness, supplies us with resources to assist us in even our darkest moments - if we are willing to turn to Him, and if we are willing to accept the resources our military community has to offer.

Intentions

May we strive to open our hearts, homes, and communities to those we know are suffering;

May we provide a beacon of light, warmth, love, and hope to those struggling within our military community;

May those struggling find the light, love, and hope offered by those around them;

May each of us be willing to be a key to opening the beauty found in those around us - and, be willing to assist another in carrying her cross in times of need.

Bible Verse

Psalms 142:7

Bring me out of prison, so that I may give thanks to your name. The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.



December 21: O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come and shine on those who dwell in darkness!

Reflection

The military lifestyle is unique in so many ways. Perhaps one of the starkest differences between military life and the civilian world is that at any given time, thousands of families are left behind while their Servicemembers continue to help keep our world safe. Servicemembers are often deployed to the far reaches of the globe. During the time of deployments, most families develop the mantra, "No news is good news," while the one deployed concentrates on coming home to their loved ones.

Deployments can be difficult for both families and Servicemembers. Sometimes, the darkness of the situations around those deployed add to their struggles. Some Servicemembers openly speak about facing evil while deployed, and it can shake a person to the core. Most, however, even when facing darkness and evil, choose to spare their family secondary experiences by suffering through the burden of darkness and evil on their own, not sharing their experiences.

Intentions

May we remember to extend the hand of friendship, share a meal, or lend comfort to families who are separated from their Servicemember loved one on deployment, temporary duty, or unaccompanied assignment;

May we always keep our deployed Servicemembers in our thoughts and prayers, both during and outside the holiday season;

May those deployed, especially to combat zones, maintain a sense of physical, emotional, and spiritual safety;

May those having difficulty readjusting home have the courage to seek help in that process.

Bible Verse

Ezekiel 34:27, 30-31

The trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase. They shall be secure on their soil; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and save them from the hands of those who enslaved them. ... They shall know that I, the Lord their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are my people, says the Lord God. You are my sheep, the sheep of my pasture and I am your God, says the Lord God.



December 22: O King of all nations and keystone of the Church: come and save man, whom you formed from the dust!

Reflection

As a military community, we are often reminded of the sanctity and fragility of life. When a family mourns the loss of its loved one, we band together and mourn in solidarity. We carry on with faith in our tears being dried, hope that we will be reunited with those who have left us all too soon, and love for our Creator and His unfolding plans.

Every year, we as a faithful people, are reminded we came from dust, and to dust our bodies will return. As a military community, we are reminded of this when our Servicemembers deploy, participate in high risk training exercises, or are given diagnoses rendering them incapable of continuing the mission of the Armed Forces. We recognize every life has value, beauty, dignity, and worth. We are also constantly reminded of the fragility of life.

Intentions

May we internalize the messages of the sanctity of life and the fragility of life, and live every day with our sights set on the reward of Heaven;

May we seek to live with faith and hope in the fulfillment of the Apostles' Creed - a resurrection of the body, and life everlasting;

May we always recognize the sanctity of all lives, and be willing to advocate for every life, no matter how small, how aged, or how abled.

Bible Verse

Ecclesiastes 12:7

and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it.



December 23: O Emmanuel, our King and Giver of Law: come to save us, Lord our God!

Reflection

It is shortly before the birth of our Lord, and excitement is in the air! Our Savior, Lord and God will assume the mantle of fully human form while remaining fully Divine. He will walk with us through our trials and accomplishments of life. For love of us, He will sacrifice Himself, all the while asking little from us in return. He begins His journey shortly, as a mere babe in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger - eschewing the riches and trappings of princes of this world. Because, while He is one of us, He is not of this world.

He will not force Himself on us, but will instead await our invitation to travel with us. He will lovingly embrace us when we turn to Him, eager to have His penitent children recognize His love and mercy and ask forgiveness for the times in which we have failed to acknowledge His role in our lives.

Lieutenant General (Retired) Hal Moore once stated in an interview on EWTN, "I'm in the business of eternity, and I hope I am successful in that business." Hal Moore displayed the values a Catholic Christian Servicemember strives to attain - one who invites Jesus to walk with her, and allows that invitation to mold her actions and beliefs.

Intentions

May we gift Jesus the invitation to journey with us, fully and without reservation on our part;

May we always keep our focus on the eternal reward, and ask God to assist us in attaining the virtues pleasing to His sight;

May we focus on the lives of the Holy Men and Women who have come before us, learning from their mistakes and their successes;

May we constantly strive to forgo the trappings of this earthly world, remembering eternal salvation is the most important.

Bible Verse

Deuteronomy 6:6-7

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.



About the Author

Mrs. AnnAliese Harry is a proud Army wife. She currently stays at home with her human puppies and fur-children, She is a contributing blogger for CatholicMom.com, Catholic Sistas, and Her View From Home. She blogs routinely about her Catholic Faith, parenting, and the military lifestyle at www.beautifulcamouflage.com, and can be found on Facebook at "A Beautiful, Camouflaged Mess of A Life," and "Everyday Ediths." She has been active in her family's local installations' Catholic Women of the Chapel groups since 2013, and credits her deep faith with helping her face the transient military lifestyle. Putting her Masters in Social Work to use, she has previously worked as a readjustment counselor for combat veterans and their families, as an early intervention clinician, and as an intensive in-home therapist, routinely applying her Faith to the clinical approach with children and families.