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*Liturgical note: The Magnificat is sung daily throughout the year at vespers or evensong, which is a traditional daily evening service of the Western and Eastern Churches. A brief antiphon (which varies according to the days and seasons of the Church year) was historically sung along with it – twice, as bookends to the Magnificat itself. These antiphons cast the canticle into view from various angles, over time encouraging greater understanding and wonder at the richness of Mary’s words. The O Antiphons, dating from the fourth century, are assigned as the Magnificat antiphons on the dates shown above.*

*-Nathan Skinner, Director of Music, Park Street Church*

-THE O ANTIPHONS-

*O Sapientia.* O Wisdom, which camest out of the mouth of the Most High, and reachest from one end to another, mightily and sweetly ordering all things: Come, teach us the way of prudence.

*O Adonai.* O Adonai 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.

*O Radix Jesse.* O Root of Jesse, which stands as a sign among the people, before whom kings will fall silent, unto whom the nations will make their prayers: Come and deliver us; tarry no longer.

*O Clavis David.* O Key of David, and Scepter of the house of Israel; who opens and no one shuts; shuts, and no one opens: Come, bring forth from their prison the captives who sit in darkness and the shadow of death.

*O Oriens.* O Radiant Dawn, Brightest of Light Everlasting, and Sun of Righteousness: Come and shine upon those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

*O Rex Gentium.* O King of the Nations, and their desire; the Corner-stone, who makest both one: Come and save mankind, whom Thou didst fashion from clay.

*O Emmanuel.* O Emmanuel [God is with us], our King and Lawgiver, the Desire of all nations, and their Salvation: Come [and] save us, O Lord our God.

-COMPOSER'S NOTE-

All seven of the *O Antiphon* texts are similar in structure. Each is addressed to, and describes, an aspect of the messianic hopes found in the Old Testament – O Wisdom, O Leader of the House of Israel, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David, O Radiant Dawn, O King of the Nations, O Emmanuel. And all of the antiphons end with the supplication “Come” – to teach, redeem, deliver, save us.

The music follows this same two-part structure. The first part of each antiphon describes the particular messianic aspect: for example, Radiant Dawn is supported by a light 16<sup>th</sup>-note ostinato; mirroring melodic lines describe the shape of the Key of David; the King of the Nations treads with measured steps. The second part in all the settings features the plaintive supplication “Come,” and often ends in E major with a minor sixth scale degree.

Musical influences include Arvo Pärt’s gorgeous setting of the same texts, the Gregorian chant itself (similar in melodic contour for all of the antiphons and heard most clearly in the second movement), and in the final movement, a hint of the hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel.”