

Dec 21st

O Oriens (O eastern Dawn)

“O Rising Dawn, brightness of the light eternal, sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.”

“The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shown” (Isa 9:1).



This Antiphon is rich in meaning on many levels. The Latin title O Oriens can be translated several ways. Oriens simply means East, but is also translated as Dawn, Daystar and Morning Star because they all rise in the East. All are harbingers of the sunrise which dispels the darkness.

The significance of this often lost on those of us who dispel the darkness with our artificial sun, but in a world lit only by fire life was ruled by sunrise and nightfall. Not surprisingly sunrise has been associated with the coming of the Messiah. Thus Radiant Dawn of the

Antiphon is reflected in Hosea 6:3, *“Let us know, let us strive to know the Lord; as certain as the dawn is his coming?”*

Luke 1:77-79 carries the theme into the New Testament: “And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God by which the daybreak from on high will visit us to shine on those who sit in darkness and death’s shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace.” This text has been associated with both Jesus and his precursor, John the Baptist since the words are attributed by Luke to Zechariah, John’s father.

For Christians, the rising sun has always been associated with the Risen Son. The early Christians prayed facing East and altars faced East. In his book, *The Spirit of Liturgy*, Pope Benedict XVI wrote: “Despite all the variations in practice that have taken place far into the second millennium, one thing has remained clear for the whole of Christendom: praying towards the East is a tradition that goes back to the beginning.” Because the altars faced East, when the priest faced the altar he was said to be offering the Mass “ad orientem” or towards the Risen Christ.

Still another example of the spiritual significance of Oriens, is the designation of the Virgin Mary as Morning Star, the precursor of the Risen Son.