

# Countdown to Christmas: December 17: The Holy Father's birthday, snowy Buffalo, and the O Antiphons



*The Chapel at The John Carroll School during this Third Week of Advent.*

## Introduction:

In the last Advent days leading up to Christmas, I will share some reflections, prayers, and music for you to enjoy during this very hectic holiday season.

## Ad Multos Annos:

It's December 17: Today is Pope Francis' 77th Birthday!!

He has brought so much joy to so many people since his election as the 265th successor of Saint Peter the Apostle this past March 13th. He has asked for our prayers from the very start, so it is no surprise that he has also asked for our prayers for his birthday.

May he be blessed for many more years to come!! Happy Birthday, dear Holy Father!!

Check out Pope Francis' special day complete with birthday cake and candles with this video from Rome Reports.



*Pope Francis at the Vatican's "Santa Marta" medical clinic, which*

***assists families with financial need. Here are some great photos from Saturday of this child who captured the heart and the zucchetto from the Holy Father. (AP Photo/Gregorio Borgia)***

### **Shuffling off to Buffalo:**

The days are flying by and soon it will be Christmas.

My husband and I flew up to Buffalo this past weekend to celebrate Christmas and her 95th birthday with my dear mother-in-law. It was a lovely time to enjoy each other's company, to also see my husband's brother and his wife, and to cherish this special early celebration.

We enjoyed lots of good reminiscing, wrote out and mailed Mom's Christmas cards, looked at all the goodies she has received, and shared Baltimore's best Berger cookies with all the good people who help her each day. I explained to a few of the nurses that just as their tourists take home hot sauce for Buffalo wings from the famous Anchor Bar, so too do visitors to Maryland enjoy our famous Berger cookies. Who can resist a good Berger cookie?

It snowed the entire time we were in town. Buffalo has lots of snowfall and storms from the lake effect off Lake Erie. It was quite beautiful, but also bitter cold with wind chills below zero. We still had a great visit, but unfortunately we did not get to take George's Mom out to eat. She loves our excursions to favorite restaurants in the area, but due to the weather, we ordered in food from three different places for delivery over the course of the weekend. We will look forward to going out to eat on our next trip!!



***From the hotel restaurant across from University of Buffalo on Sunday morning:***

***Photo by Patti Murphy Dohn***

## **The Advent “O Antiphons”**

***“O Wisdom of our God Most High,  
guiding creation with power and love:  
come to teach us the path of knowledge!”***

***—Today’s Antiphon for December 17***



The hymn “O Come, O Come, Emmanuel” is a much-loved Advent classic. And today the Church starts the singing and the praying of the “O Antiphons,” long used with the recitation or chanting of the “Magnificat”

during Evening Vespers of the Liturgy of the Hours. In similar form to the classic hymn, these antiphons are now used primarily as the Alleluia verse before the Gospel reading at daily Mass. A different one for each day of the week before Christmas Eve, these beautiful verses invoke the coming of the Messiah using a different biblical image as a title and ending with a prayer intention.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops website shares this information about these beautiful verses:

*“The Roman Church has been singing the “O” Antiphons since at least the eighth century. They are the antiphons that accompany the Magnificat canticle of Evening Prayer from December 17-23. They are a magnificent theology that uses ancient biblical imagery drawn from the messianic hopes of the Old Testament to proclaim the coming Christ as the fulfillment not only of Old Testament hopes, but present ones as well. Their repeated use of the imperative “Come!” embodies the longing of all for the Divine Messiah.”*

**Music for your Enjoyment:**

***Enjoy this amazing arrangement of the classic Advent hymn by The Piano Guys: with Steven Sharp Nelson on cello and Jon Schmidt on Piano. Filmed on the set of Jerusalem movie set.***

**Prayer for December 17:**

*Oh, God of wisdom,  
I want to praise you and give you my life.*

*Like a loving parent,  
you bless me.  
You have watched over me,  
knowing my history  
and the path that led me to you.*

*Thank you for the peace  
you promise peace in my life.  
I ask that I be always aware  
of the strength of your great power.  
May it never leave me.*

*So many people before me  
in so many generations,  
have served you so humbly,  
answering your call.  
Please give me the wisdom and courage  
to be your humble servant.*

*Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel  
Shall come to thee, O Israel!*

*Amen.*