

The Chants of Christmas — Program Notes

The Chants of Christmas presents a document of the Gregorian chant Masses first written to celebrate this most joyful season. Although the celebration of Christmas is a more recent development than that of Easter, dating from the fourth century, it has an abundance of exquisite chant Masses from which to choose. Four Masses constitute the celebration of Christmas: *Missam in Vigilia*—celebrated before the Night Office; *Missam in Nocte*—celebrated after the Night Office, at “Cock-crow”; *Missam in Aurora*—celebrated at dawn; and *Missam in Die*—celebrated at the hour of Terce. It is fair to say that no other celebration in the Church Year contains so many Masses.

The first three of these Christmas Masses were originally celebrated at S. Maria Maggiore in Rome, a basilica built by Pope Sixtus III in 432 to commemorate the success of the Council of Ephesus by honoring Mary, the Blessed Mother of Jesus. Under this magnificent basilica, a replica of the cave considered to be the original birth-place of Jesus, was built.

Each Mass for the Christmas season has its own unique character and sound. The *Missam in Vigilia* is built on the anticipation of the birth of Christ. It proclaims the good news of salvation prepared for us by God through the birth of His Son. It is a quietly joyful Mass and a splendid introduction to this most blessed of days. The *Missam in Nocte* occurs at the hour when tradition tells us Jesus was born. It emphasizes God’s tender love for His Son. This “Mass at the crib” also proclaims God’s great love for man, in spite of man’s “condition” as evidenced in the verses of this Mass. The Mass celebrated at dawn on Christmas Day, the *Missam in Aurora*, is permeated with light; its emphasis is on the coming of the Light into the world. It is one of the most joyous of the Masses. Finally, the *Missam in Die* is a moving expression of the evangelical message: “The Lord has made known His salvation.”

While the Marian antiphons are not liturgically part of the Christmas season, they are included here, as this was the time that Our Lady gave birth to God’s greatest gift to mankind. The antiphons are medieval in origin, and as with most antiphons, were originally used before and after the chanting of a psalm or canticle. Here, both simple and florid forms of the antiphon are included, with the florid considered the more ancient. Each of these antiphons has its own unique beauty, adding to the attraction of these timeless pieces.

Texts and Translations

Missam in Vigilia

The first Mass that can be celebrated for Christmas is the *Missam in Vigilia*. This Mass is built on the anticipation of the coming event. It begins by proclaiming the good news of the salvation prepared for us by a loving God through the birth of His Son. It is a quietly joyful Mass and a suitable introduction to this most blessed of days.

1. Introit: Hodie scietis

Hodie scietis, quia veniet Dominus, et salvabit nos: et mane videbitis gloriam eius.

V. Domini est terra, et plenitudo eius: orbis terrarum, et universi qui habitant in eo.

Today you shall know that the Lord is coming, and that He shall save us: and in the morning you shall see His glory.

V. The earth is the Lord’s, and its fullness: the whole world, and all who dwell in it.

2. Gradual: Hodie scietis

Hodie scietis, quia veniet Dominus, et salvabit nos: et mane videbitis gloriam eius.

V. Qui regis Israel, intende: qui deducis velut ovem Ioseph: qui sedes super Cherubim, appare coram Ephraim, Benjamin, et Manasse.

Today you shall know that the Lord is coming, and that He shall save us: and in the morning you shall see His glory.

V. Thou who rulest Israel, behold: Thou who leadest Joseph like a sheep: Who sittest upon the Cherubim, show Thyself before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.

3. Alleluia: Crastina die

Alleluia. Crastina die delebitur iniquitas terrae: et regnabit super nos Salvator mundi.

Alleluia. Tomorrow the iniquity of the earth shall be removed: and the Savior of the world shall reign over us.

4. Offertory: Tollite portas

Tollite portas, principes, vestras: et elevamini, portæ aeternales, et introibit Rex gloriæ.

Lift up your gates, O princes: and be lifted up, O eternal doors, and the King of glory shall come in.

5. Communion: Revelabitur

Revelabitur gloria Domini: et videbit omnis caro salutare Dei nostri.

V. Domini est terra, et plenitudo eius: orbis terrarum, et universi qui habitant in eo.

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed: and all flesh shall see the salvation of our God.

V. The earth is the Lord's, and its fullness: the whole world, and all who dwell in it.

Missam in Nocte

This Mass occurs at the hour tradition sets as the time of our Lord's birth. The Introit sets the tone of this "Mass at the crib" and emphasizes God's tender love for His Son. This is highlighted in the music by the drawing-out of the word *meus*. God's great love for His creation, man, is also evident in spite of the "condition" of man evidenced in the verses.

6. Introit: Dominus dixit

(Ant.) Dominus dixit ad me: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te.

V. Quare fremuerunt gentes: et populi meditare sunt inania?

(Ant.) Dominus . . .

V. Astiterunt reges terræ, et principes convenerunt in unum adversus Dominum, et adversus Christum eius.

(Ant.) Dominus . . .

V. Postula a me, et dabo tibi gentes hereditatum tuam, et possessionem tuam terminus terræ.

(Ant.) Dominus . . .

(Ant.) The Lord said to me: Thou art my Son, today I have begotten Thee.

V. Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?

(Ant.) The Lord said . . .

V. The kings of the earth stood by, and the princes gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

(Ant.) The Lord said . . .

V. Ask of Me, and I will give Thee the nations as Thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth as Thy possession.

(Ant.) The Lord said . . .

7. Gradual: Tecum principium

Tecum principium in die virtutis tuæ: in splendoribus sanctorum, ex utero ante luciferum genui te.

V. Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede a dextris meis: donec ponam inimicos tuos scabellum pedum tuorum.

Sovereign strength is Thine on the day of Thy great might. Amidst the splendors of the heavenly sanctuary, from the womb, before the morning star, I have begotten Thee.

V. The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a stool for Thy feet."

8. Alleluia: Dominus dixit

Alleluia. Dominus dixit ad me: Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te.

Alleluia. The Lord said to me: Thou art my Son, today I have begotten Thee.

9. Offertory: Lætentur cæli

Lætentur cæli, et exsultet terra ante faciem Domini: quoniam venit.

Let the heavens rejoice and let the earth be glad before the face of the Lord, for He cometh.

10. Communion: In splendoribus

In splendoribus sanctorum, ex utero ante luciferum genui te.

V. Dixit Dominus Domino meo: Sede a dextris meis: donec ponam inimicos tuos scabellum pedum tuorum.

Amidst the splendors of the heavenly sanctuary, out of the womb, before the morning star, I have begotten Thee.

V. The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a stool for Thy feet."

Ad Missam in Aurora

The Mass celebrated at dawn on Christmas Day is resplendent with its emphasis on the coming of The Light into the world, and with the dawn of new beauty and strength. It calls on the Church as the “Daughter of Sion” to exult with joy in the Savior of the World—He who is to have come, has come.

11. Introit: Lux fulgebit

Lux fulgebit hodie super nos: quia natus est nobis Dominus: et vocabitur Admirabilis, Deus, Princeps pacis, Pater future sæculi: cuius regni non erit finis.
V. Dominus regnavit, decorum indutus est: indutus est Dominus fortitudinem, et præcinxit se.

Today the light shall shine on us: for the Lord is born to us: and He shall be called Wonderful, God, Prince of peace, Father of the ages to come: Whose reign shall have no end.
V. The Lord reigns, He is clothed in beauty: the Lord has put on strength, and has girded Himself.

12. Gradual: Benedictus qui venit

Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini: Deus Dominus, et illuxit nobis.
V. A Domino factum est: et est mirabile in oculis nostris.

Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord: God the Lord, and He has risen upon us.
V. This is the Lord’s doing: and it is marvelous in our eyes.

13. Alleluia: Dominus regnavit

Alleluia: Dominus regnavit, decorum induit: induit Dominum fortitudinem, et præcinxit se virtute.

Alleluia: The Lord reigns, He is clothed in beauty: the Lord has put on strength, and has girded Himself with virtue.

14. Offertory: Deus enim firmavit

Deus enim firmavit orbem terræ, qui non commovebitur: parata sedes tua, Deus, ex tunc, a sæculo tu es.

God indeed has established the round world, which will not be shaken: Thy throne is prepared, O God, from that time onward, and Thou art forever.

15. Communion: Exsulta filia Sion

(Ant.) Exsulta filia Sion, lauda filia Ierusalem: ecce Rex tuus venit sanctus, et Salvator mundi.
V. Benedicam Dominum in omni tempore; Semper laus eius in ore meo.
(Ant.) Exsulta . . .
V. In Domino laudabitur anima mea: Audiant mansueti, et lætentur.
(Ant.) Exsulta . . .

(Ant.) Exult, O daughter of Sion, praise, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold your King comes; He is holy, and is the Savior of the world.
V. I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise is always in my mouth.
(Ant.) Exult . . .
V. My soul rejoices in the Lord: Let the meek hear, and be joyful.
(Ant.) Exult . . .

Ad Missam in Die

The text of the Propers of the *Missam in Die* is a fully mature expression of the evangelical message, proclaiming “The Lord has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations.”

16. Introit: Puer natus est

Puer natus est nobis, et filius datus est nobis: cuius imperium super humerum eius: et vocabitur nomen eius, magni consilii Angelus.
V. Cantate Domino canticum novum: quia mirabilis fecit.

Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. The insignia of His reign is on His shoulder and His name shall be the Angel of Great Counsel.
V. Sing unto the Lord a new song, for He has done wonderful things.

17. Gradual: Viderunt omnes

Viderunt omnes fines terræ salutare Dei nostril: iubilate Deo omnis terra.
V. Notum fecit Dominus salutare suum: ante conspectum gentium revelavit iustitiam suam.

All the ends of the earth have seen our God’s salvation; make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth.
V. The Lord has made known His salvation: He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations.

18. Alleluia: Dies sanctificatus

Alleluia: Dies sanctificatus illuxit nobis: venite gentes, et adorete Dominum: quia hodie descendit lux magna super terram.

Alleluia. A holy day has dawned upon us: come all ye peoples and adore the Lord. For today a truly great light has descended upon the earth.

19. Offertory: Tui sunt cæli

Tui sunt cæli, and tua est terra: orbem terrarum, et plenitudinem eius tu fundasti: iustitia et iudicium præparatio sedis tuæ.

20. Communion: Viderunt omnes

(Ant.) Viderunt omnes fines terræ salutare Dei nostril.
V. Cantate Domino canticum novum, quia mirabilia fecit.

(Ant.) Viderunt . . .

V. Salvabit sibi dextera eius, et brachium sanctum eius.

(Ant.) Viderunt . . .

Thine are the heavens, Thine is the earth: the world and the fullness thereof have been founded by Thee. Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne.

(Ant.) All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation which comes from our God.

V. Sing unto the Lord a new song, for He has done wonderful things.

(Ant.) All the ends . . .

V. His right hand will save Him, and His holy arm.

(Ant.) All the ends . . .

Marian Antiphons

Though the antiphons to Our Lady are not liturgically Christmas, it seemed appropriate to include them as part of a recording of the Masses of Christmas since it was during this season that Our Lady gave birth to God's greatest gift to mankind. The antiphons are medieval in origin, and as with most antiphons, were originally used before and after the chanting of a psalm or canticle. Each of the four antiphons has its own individual character and beauty, and each has its own special "time" and place in the cycle.

In this recording, both the simple and more florid forms of each of these antiphons have been included. In each case the more florid version is believed to be the more ancient.

21./25. Alma Redemptoris Mater

Alma Redemptoris Mater quæ pervia cæli Porta manes,
Et stella maris, succurre cadenti Surgere qui curat populo:

Tu quæ genuisti, Natura mirante, tuum sanctum Genitorem:

Virgo prius ac posterius, Gabrielis ab ore Sumens illud Ave,
peccatorum miserere.

22./26. Ave regina cælorum

Ave Regina Cælorum, Ave Domina Angelorum:
Salve radix, salve porta, Ex qua munda lux est orta:

Gaude Virgo gloriosa, Super omnes speciosa:
Vale o valde decora, Et pro nobis Christum exora.

23./27. Regina cæli

Regina Cæli lætare, alleluia:
Quia quem meruisti portare, alleluia:
Resurrexit, sicut dixit, alleluia:
Ora pro nobis Deum, alleluia.

24./28. Salve regina

Salve Regina, mater misericordiæ:
Vita dulcedo, et spes nostra, salve.
Ad te clamamus, exsules, filii Hevæ.
Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes in hac lacrimarum valle.
Eia ergo, Advocata nostra,
Illos tuos misericordias oculos ad nos converte.
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
Nobis post hoc exsiliium ostende:
O Clemens: O pia: O dulcis Virgo Maria.

O kind Mother of the Redeemer, who remainest the ever-open door to heaven,
And Star of the sea, come to the aid of the people who have fallen and who strive to be raised up again.
Thou hast given birth, to the wonder of all nature, to thy Holy Creator.
Thou who remainest ever virgin, both before and after receiving that greeting of the angel Gabriel, have mercy on us sinners.

Hail, Queen of the Heavens, Hail, Queen of the Angels:
Hail, stem of Jesse, hail, gateway to heaven, Through thee light has risen over the world:
Rejoice, O glorious Virgin, most beautiful among women!
Hail, highly honored one: implore Christ for us.

Queen of heaven, rejoice, alleluia:
For He Whom thou wast worthy to bear, alleluia:
Is risen, as He said, alleluia:
Pray to God for us, alleluia.

Hail, Holy Queen, mother of mercy:
Our life, our sweetness and our hope, hail.
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.
To thee do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping in this vale of tears.
Turn then, our most gracious advocate,
Thine eyes of mercy toward us.
And after this our exile,
Show us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.