

# DECEMBER 21

# O ORIENS

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*O Radiant Dawn, splendor of eternal light, sun of justice: come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.*

For five years, my morning commute took me along Lakeshore Drive in Chicago at the crack of dawn. As I made my way south, the lake stretched out to my left—some mornings calm and still like glass, and other days windswept whitecaps and waves crashing upon the shore. Over the course of the year there were a few precious weeks when I could watch the sun rise over the lake.

Slowly, the sky lightens—the first hints brightening in the sky. I begin to see more clearly the details of things around me, as the all encompassing darkness fades to a mixture of shadows and light. The sky begins to reflect a splendor of color and then, the first rays begin to peek over the horizon.

The light now shines freely across the water, bathing the city in its radiant glow as everything takes on a hint of reflected glory. As the sun rises above the surface of the lake, the reflected rays in the water are almost like a path leading me directly toward the light. All too quickly, the sun rises above the horizon and the day begins. The gentle expectant glow fades into the routine of daily life, yet I carry with me the memory of hopeful splendor.

On this day we pray *O Oriens, O Dayspring, O Radiant Dawn!* From the darkness of the shadow of death we yearn for the Light of Christ, who is Light of the World.

Moving through Advent, the days grow shorter as darkness appears to be overwhelming our world. Until today—the Winter Solstice, the day with the least amount of sunlight—when we proclaim the dawning of Christ’s light into our lives. From this day forward, we look to the light that shines in the darkness,

...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 in death’s shadow, to guide our feet into the path of peace. (Luke 1:78–79)

Each morning we encounter anew the dawning of Christ’s love in our lives. Jesus’ light, the eternal light, shines forth in our lives at all times, yet is sometimes hidden from our view by the obstacles, attitudes, actions, and circumstances that cast a shadow upon our lives. In praying *O Oriens* we call for the light to break through like the dawn.

During Advent, in the shortest of days when darkness seems to be winning the battle outside and the shadow of death seems to be creeping into our hearts, the Morning Star, the Dayspring, the Light of Life, the Sun of Justice, shines forth.

The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
Upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom  
a light has shone. (Isaiah 9:1)