

The Marian Antiphons – *Alma Redemptoris Mater*

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It has been a joy to pray and sing with fellow parishioners at Sacred Heart for a little over five months now. I am always intrigued by the local customs that have developed within various parish communities. One particularly inspiring custom at Sacred Heart has been to regularly sing and pray the Marian Antiphon. What a beautiful observance of Catholic piety to hear the *Salve Regina* sung by so many people from the assembly!

The *Salve Regina* is but one of the four seasonal Marian antiphons that is observed during the liturgical year. This antiphon, a traditional Carmelite hymn, is sung after Pentecost until the first Sunday in Advent. As a spoken prayer, the *Salve Regina* is often prayed at the conclusion of the rosary: "Hail holy queen, mother of mercy..."

As we reach the season of Advent, the Church now observes the *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, which is sung through Advent until the Feast of the Purification on February 2 – the traditional concluding date of the Christmas season. This 11th century prayer tells of the angel Gabriel's announcement, and of Mary's divine motherhood.

The *Alma Redemptoris Mater* describes Mary as the *gate of heaven*, which is a reference to her perpetual virginity, as foretold by the prophet Ezekiel: "This gate is to remain shut. It must not be opened; no one may enter through it. It is to remain shut because the LORD, the God of Israel, has entered through it." (Ez 44:2)

The antiphon designates our Blessed Mother as the *star of the sea*. Mary's name in Hebrew – *Miryam*, meaning "drop of the sea." The imagery suggests that the Mother of God is the interceding light to all Christians. She is like the moon, which is lightless, until it reflects a guiding light from the sun (the Son). In his classic book, *True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, Louis Grignion de Montfort would famously coin the phrase, "To Jesus through Mary."

As we wait with joyful hope for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ during this season of Advent, let us pray the *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, and seek our Lord Jesus, through his Blessed Mother, Mary most holy.

Alma Redemptoris Mater, quae pervia caeli porta manes et stella maris, succurre cadenti, surgere qui curat, populo: tu quae genuisti, natura mirante, tuum sanctum genitorem, Virgo prius, ac posterius, Gabrielis ab ore sumens illud ave, peccatorum miserere.