

December 14<sup>th</sup>

Isaiah 7:10-16

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In a few days we begin the final part of Advent, a period some know as Late Advent (Dec. 17-23). During that time Old Testament names for the messiah are often used at prayer. Known as the 'O' Antiphons, each name begins with 'O': O Wisdom, O Root of Jesse, O Key of David ...

This scripture passage from Isaiah foretells the coming of Immanuel ('God with us') and how we will recognize the Messiah. The ancient 'O' Antiphon texts form the basis for the hymn "O Come, O Come Emmanuel".

Late Advent for me is a solace. The beginning of Advent often seems to be lost in other things I love and celebrate: Thanksgiving, Harvest season, fall weather with its opportunity to fully immerse oneself in God's creation. Sometimes they can impinge upon the early part of Advent, however.

The end of fall and the beginning of Advent with all these competing priorities is when I most treasure pine cones. At this time of year in the northern hemisphere, when more attention-getting plants have declined, pine cones evoke in me gratitude for all creation. Either found where I live or in places I may be visiting, they remind me of God's enduring love and the beauty of what can be the most ubiquitous of natural objects.

I use pine cones to decorate spaces, either alone or with evergreens. I delight in finding ones with different shapes. Sometimes other forces beyond my control can divert focus from earlier weeks of Advent. Each year, however, I recall the steadfast, lowly pine cone and mark my calendar for Dec. 17, in an effort to clear my life for those seven days before Christmas.

