

Part III: The Practice of the Office



In this section we will look at how we prepare for the Office and how we do things. First, it should be mentioned, that most often we sing these services when offered publicly, though they will be most often read when prayed privately. There are basic, customary melodies, familiar to many of Anglican, Roman Catholic or Lutheran backgrounds, and now familiar

throughout Western Rite Orthodoxy. When we sing chant as a congregation, we should always strive to sing with one voice, no voice louder than the rest, nor faster or slower than others. This requires listening to one another as we strive to offer common prayer. The officiant and cantors will set the pace; the chants are best sung at the tempo and rhythm one would use in clearly speaking the same texts. The chants do not have to be pitched exactly as written, but should not be pitched too high or too low, but rather at a comfortable level.

Initially it may appear as though there is too much material to master, but you will find that it gets much easier with time, and we do repeat the same chants over and over and over. Remember the classic joke about how you get to Carnegie Hall - *“practice, practice, practice...”* If we want to offer our very best as we pray the office, we need to offer it frequently - so *“again and again let us pray to the Lord.”* If you have the freedom to pray the Office daily, you will find it to be a blessing for yourselves and for your people. Those of us who are bi-vocational will probably not be able to offer daily, public services. While your private rule of prayer is best worked out with your own spiritual father, as priests we should publicly offer Saturday Vespers and Sunday Matins, as well as the appropriate Office before feast day liturgies, if at all possible. The Office is part of our preparation for the liturgy and for receiving Holy Communion.

I want to be very clear about this: we cannot overemphasize the importance of preparing for the Office (and for all of our services, for that matter). If you dash in at the

last minute and begin without preparation, it will show and will send a most unfortunate message to our people. If we remember the importance of what we are doing we will prepare. What are the steps of getting ready? (And please forgive me for being very basic here and stating the obvious at times).

1. Look at the calendar to see what Sunday or feast day you are observing. Is there a secondary commemoration? There are very complex *Tables of Precedence* available to determine when a feast day takes priority over a Sunday, or what happens to feast days during Lent and Passion-tide, what to do about a Vigil that falls at a confusing time, and to give the answers to countless other questions. These *Tables of Precedence* have changed from time to time, and various feasts were given different rankings at different times and places, so the bottom line is to follow the calendar that you have been given. In the Antiochian Archdiocese we have an official *Ordo*, which is often adapted by local priorities and customs.

In *The Antiphoner* a local *Kalendar* is given on page 261 for convenience, but it has no real authority. Recently a parishioner asked me, “why is *Kalendar* spelled with a ‘K’?” and so I replied, “because we’ve always done it that way!” which is actually true, in that it goes back to the Latin word, *Kalends*, referring to the first day of the month. In our *Kalendar* those entries in **bold** indicate both a feast day of higher ranking, and that propers for that feast day will be found in *The Antiphoner*; other days might make use of the *Commons* (page 490ff) or be kept as simple memorials.

FEBRUARY	
1	St. Ignatius of Antioch, BM, c. 107, D; St. Bridgid, Abs, 523, S
2	Presentation of our Lord: Purification of BVM, D2
3	St. Blaise, BM, c. 316, Sd
4	Neo-Martyrs of Russia, MM, 1917 and following, D; St. Joseph of Aleppo, M, 1686, S
5	St. Agatha, VM, c. 250, GD

Remember also that our greatest feasts have *Octaves*, as we continue the celebration for eight days. Ever since Octaves were first introduced back in the fourth century there has been “development” as to which feasts should be observed in this manner; at minimum we should keep octaves for Christmas, Epiphany, Pascha, Pentecost, Assumption, All Saints, and the feast of the Dedication (if your parish has one). Again the bottom line is to follow the calendar that you have been given. During Octaves we repeat the Collect for the feast every day, as well as repeating the Office Hymn, versicle and response and antiphons, on *ferias* within that period.

2. Once you know what Sunday or feast day you will be observing, turn to the corresponding page in *The Antiphoner*.

The Third Sunday of Advent

Double of I Class: Rose (or Purple)

Sun / *1V*: 1 Kgs. 18:1-20; Rev. 13

M: Isa. 40:1-11; Luke 3:1-18

2V: Isa. 61; Matt. 9:35-10:7

Mon / *M*: II Esd. 6:38-55; Mark 8:1-21

V: 1 Kgs. 18:21-end; Rev. 14

Tue / *M*: Ecclus. 42:15-43:10; Mark

8:22-9:1

V: 1 Kgs. 19; Rev. 15 & 16

Wed / *M*: Ecclus.43:11-end ; Mark 9:2-29

V: 1 Kgs.20:1-21; Rev. 17

Thu / *M*: Ecclus.16:24-17:15 ; Mark

9:30-end

V: 1 Kgs.20:22-34; Rev. 18

Fri / *M*: Ecclus. 18:1-14; Mark 10:1-31

V: 1 Kgs.20:35-end; Rev. 19

Sat / *M*: Ecclus. 51:1-12; Mark 10:32-end

Evening Hymn: Creator of the stars of night - SAH #29

V. Drop down, ye heavens from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness. *R*. Let the earth open and bring forth a Savior.

★*1V - Antiphon on Magnificat (if not "O" Antiphon)*: Before me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after me: * for to me shall every knee be bowed, and me shall every tongue confess.

2V - Antiphon on Magnificat (if not "O" Antiphon): Go your way to John, and say ye: the blind do see, and the deaf hear: * the lepers are cleansed, and the lame do walk.

Invitatory: The Lord, who now is nigh at hand: * O come, let us worship.

Morning Hymn: O Word that goest forth on high - SAH #36 *or* Hark! A thrilling voice is sounding - SAH #31

V. The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord. *R*. Make straight the paths of our God.

Antiphon on Benedictus: I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: * Prepare ye the way of the Lord, as said Esaias the prophet.

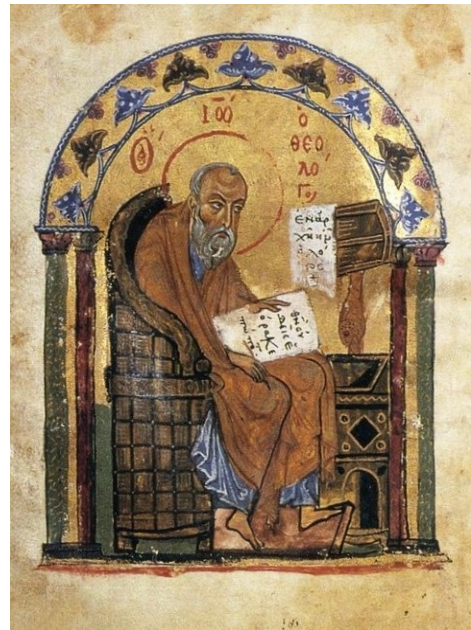
Or, Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and asked him, saying: * Art thou he which is to come, or look we for another?

Collect: Lord, we beseech thee, give ear to our prayers: and by thy gracious visitation lighten the darkness of our heart: who livest and reignest with God the Father...

Or, Collect: O Lord Jesu Christ, who at thy first coming didst send thy messenger to prepare the way before thee: grant that the ministers and stewards of thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; that at thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in thy sight: Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God world without end. Amen.

Note that there are separate sections for “Sundays after Pentecost” (p. 312ff) for those offering The Liturgy of St. Gregory, and for “Sundays after Trinity” (p. 342ff) for those celebrating what we call the Liturgy of St. Tikhon (based on the English Missal form of the Prayerbook liturgy), to match the Gospels in the respective lectionaries. Elsewhere in *The Antiphoner* you will find occasions when there are two collects, for example on the Third Sunday of Advent; the first Collect given is for use in parishes using the Gregorian liturgy, the second is for use in parishes using the Prayerbook liturgy. The same is true in a few occasions where multiple antiphons are provided, again as with the Third Sunday of Advent, where the first antiphon for the *Benedictus* matches the Gregorian gospel and the second matches the gospel for the Prayerbook liturgy. Things get a little confusing at the end of the seasons after Epiphany and after Pentecost, due to the variable number of Sundays in those season, depending on the date of Pascha, hence instructions concerning what to do at those times is given on page 340f.

3. When you have located the correct page for the day, you will see first the ranking or class for the day, along with the color of the vestments. Then the lessons for the week are given on Sunday listings, and for the day on feast day listings. Next the variable portions are listed, starting with Vespers, as the liturgical day begins with sunset. For Vespers you will find the evening Office hymn (#29 in the example given above), the versicle and response (*V. Drop down ye heavens...*), and antiphons for both 1st Vespers (Saturday) and 2nd Vespers (Sunday) where a star ★ marks the recommended antiphon if only one Vespers will be offered (Saturday or Sunday). For Matins the Invitatory Antiphon is given “The Lord, who now is nigh at hand...”, followed by the Morning Office Hymn (#36 or #31), the versicle and response (*V. The voice of one crying...*), and the antiphon on the *Benedictus*. After the sections for Vespers and Matins, the Collect for the Day is given.



4. Next mark the pages so that you don’t have to pause while flipping pages to find the next item during the service. In a Bible or Daily Office Lesson Book mark both of the lessons for the day. In *The English Office Noted* mark the psalms for the day, the proper page in *The Antiphoner* (both for the day and for any secondary commemoration, as you

will need that day's collect), mark the Office hymn and the Marian anthem for the season. You may wish to add tabs to the book, (such as *Avery Gunned Index Tabs*, item no. 59-106), which I use to permanently mark Matins and Vespers and the Opening Sentences, then I use ribbons or book marks for the variables. You will probably need some system, such as a bulletin or hymn board, to announce the variables to the congregation, as announcing the page numbers vocally disrupts the flow of the service.

5. Once you have found and marked all of the components of the service, see what you don't know and take whatever steps are needed to prepare. Look through the lessons so that you may read them and convey the proper sense (mindful that you are reading - passing on - the Word of God), and also to see what names are unpronounceable and look them up. Check the psalms tones and hymns; if they are unfamiliar and you will not be able to sing them confidently, go to a piano or other keyboard (even one on a smart phone or tablet) and play through the melodies, or find someone who can play them for you - again practice, as needed. We'll come back to how to sing the psalms in a few minutes. You should also encourage your cantors and readers and acolytes to mark pages and prepare in the same manner. At times it may be appropriate to have a congregational rehearsal, for example before the First Sunday of Advent it might be helpful to have a congregational rehearsal for the Morning and Evening Office hymns. Remember that liturgy is often called "the work of the people" and we want to offer our best to God in our prayers, so a little work may be in order.



6. If you have looked at the Office Hymn and decided that there is little chance that you could possibly sing that tune without a musical train wreck occurring, what should you do? You do not have the option of omitting the hymn. Unlike most of the hymns we may chose to sing at Mass, the Office

Hymn is set by the liturgy, so we have no choice here - we will sing that text on that occasion - but we do have a choice for the tune. In *The St. Ambrose Hymnal* and duplicated in the section at the end of *The Antiphoner* we have set Office Hymns to recommended tunes, often to the tunes traditionally paired with those texts, but we can always choose a different, simpler tune when needed.

Look, for example at Hymn #54 in *The St. Ambrose Hymnal*, “Jesu, the Father’s only Son,” the evening Office Hymn for Christmastide. A beautiful Sarum plainsong tune, traditionally associated with this text in England has been provided. If you decide you will not be able to manage to learn this tune this year, you can look at the very last item on the page and those letters or numbers (LM, 11.11.11.5, etc.) are the meter of the hymn, a reference to how many syllables there are in each line of text. Then you can find the *Metrical Index* at the back of *The St. Ambrose Hymnal* or in most other hymnals, and find the same meter, in this case LM (long meter, which is to say four lines of eight syllables each). Look for a tune that may be familiar, such as *Puer nobis*, Hymn #70. Now

try singing the text for Hymn #54 to the tune at #70, and thus you have a way of singing the proper Office Hymn without causing that ‘train wreck.’

“Jesu, the Father’s only Son” to *Christe Redemptor omnium*

Je-su, the Fa - ther’s on - ly Son, whose death for...

“Jesu, the Father’s only Son” to *Puer nobis*

Je - su, the Fa - ther’s on - ly Son, whose death for...

7. After you have completed all of this preparation for the office, now you are ready to light candles and charcoal, put on your surplice (and perhaps a cope, depending on your parish practice), say the prayers of preparation and begin the service.

The two final things I wish to discuss in this section are how to chant the Psalms and how to chant the antiphons.

To chant the Psalms, the psalms are “pointed,” which refers to the system which tells us which syllables to sing to which notes. There are a number of different systems for pointing, so here I will only comment on that used in *The English Office Noted*. The first two syllables of the first verse (the *incipit*) are capitalized, to mark that they will be sung to the first two notes of the tone. While these notes are repeated in each verse of the Gospel Canticles, they are only sung in the first verse of each Psalm. The words which follow, until we reach the / are sung to the reciting note. The words between the / and the * are sung to the notes of the mediation. A brief pause may be observed at the *; in a

enough' to use together, or it may be desirable to offer the Gregorian tones on special occasions, but for regular use we recommend that another option be chosen.

Normally the antiphon will be sung by a cantor or by the officiant, and not by the congregation. We have provided suggestions on p. 257 of *The Antiphoner*. The simplest option is to monotone the antiphons, then sing the psalm or canticle to the tone as pointed.

A slightly better method would be to monotone the antiphon but provide a simple ending, then sing the psalm or canticle to the tone as pointed.



Antiphon on Magnificat: They which in an honest and good heart receive the word, bring forth / fruit with patience.

The next option is to sing the antiphon to the same tone as will be used for the psalm or canticle.



Antiphon on Magnificat: (Behold, now) is the accepted time; behold, now is the day / of salvation: * let us therefore in these days approve ourselves as the servants of God, in much patience, in watchings, in fastings, / and by love unfeigned.

Sir. 24, 5; Sap. 8, 1; Is. 40, 14

Ant.
2 d.
O

Sa-pi-énti- a, * quæ ex o-re Altíssimi pro-
dísti, attingens a fi-ne usque ad fi-nem fórti ter,
su-á-vi-ter disponénsque ómni- a: ve-ni ad docéndum
nos vi- am prudénti- æ. E u o u a e.

We have also provided simple melodies which might be used (*Antiphoner*, p. 258); and for comparison, here is a proper Gregorian melody (at left).

Before 1955, for days ranking below “Double”, in the Roman and Monastic Offices, the practice was to chant the incipit of the antiphon before the canticle, and only chant the whole antiphon following the

canticle. Thus you would sing "I am." before the Magnificat at Vespers for the Second Sunday after Easter (a semi- double). Then after the canticle concluded we would finally discover the meaning of that statement as we hear, "I am the Shepherd of the sheep: I am the way, the truth, and the life: I am the Good Shepherd..." This was a way to shorten the Office, omitting portions of the lengthy settings of the antiphons to florid chant. The monastics already knew the texts 'by heart,' and having the full chant on major occasions was one of many ways to mark the festivity, as antiphons were “doubled” on days that were “Doubles.” When the commission of the Russian Synod reviewed the Office from *The Book of Common Prayer* in 1904 they called for enhancing the Office with, "recourse in prayer to the Holy Mother of God, to the Angel Hosts, and to the illustrious Saints, (and) the glorification and invocation of them.” The office hymns and antiphons supply what is lacking in the Prayerbook tradition. In editing *The English Office Noted* and *The Antiphoner* we have sought to follow the direction given by the Synod; thus we were more concerned for providing the teaching of the Church, as the people sing and hear the office hymns and antiphons, than transferring rubrics from the Monastic Office to *The English Office*. It is certainly always appropriate for us to sing the full text of the antiphons before and after the canticles.

We have also included the monastic forms for the Midday Office (or *Sext*) on page 218, and Compline on page 232, but I will simply mention that they are available in the book and leave discussion of those offices for another time.



Remember that we pray these services, Matins and Vespers, to spend time with God, to be reminded of His ways, to be reminded of how we are to be. We are strengthened and consoled as we hear God’s holy word in Scripture. We are instructed in our faith in the Scripture, hymns and antiphons. We pray for the Church, for ourselves and for those in need.

The Church has always prayed in this manner; it is a good and right and helpful and joyful thing to do. *Thanks be to God!*

Selected Bibliography

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