The cover features a highly detailed, monochromatic decorative border. At the top, two winged angels in medieval-style clothing are seated on a ledge, flanking a central, vertically oriented, teardrop-shaped object. The background behind them is filled with intricate floral and foliate patterns. Below the angels, the border continues with ornate scrollwork, including what appears to be a classical bust or face on the left and right sides. The overall style is reminiscent of Gothic or medieval manuscript illumination.

PSALM
BOOKLET

Singing
the
Psalms

REV. CYNTHIA
BOURGEAULT, PH.D.

Sounds True, Inc., Boulder CO 80306

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Singing the Psalms

ISBN 1-56455-385-8

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REV. CYNTHIA BOURGEAULT, PH.D.

SOUNDS TRUE, BOULDER, COLORADO

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WHAT ARE THE PSALMS?

The psalms constitute the nineteenth book of the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament. It was once believed that most of these lyrical songs of praise and supplication were written by the biblical King David; however, modern scholarship now largely discounts this popular tradition. When an assembly of rabbis convened during the first century CE to determine the contents of the Holy Scriptures, the psalms were included in the segment of the Hebrew Bible called the *Ketuvim* (Writings). Their inclusion indicates that the psalms are held to have been divinely inspired.

Both Protestant and Catholic psalters (psalm books) count one hundred and fifty psalms—but Roman psalters combine Psalms 10 and 11, so that the two versions are off by one number until they come together again at Psalm 147. The numbering on *Singing the Psalms* follows the Protestant standard, which is more widely used in contemporary churches.

A wide variety of psalters is available today, based not only on differing translations of the Hebrew but also on a range of interpretations. Some, for example, have updated the language of the psalms to apply more directly to contemporary life. *Singing the Psalms* makes use of the in-house psalter of the New Camaldoli Monastery in Big Sur, California, which combines a faithfulness

to tradition with a sensitivity to modern inclusive language. See Additional Resources on page 26 for some alternative psalters.

The psalms are organized in verses; and for the purposes of chanting, in smaller “versicles.” *On Singing the Psalms*, you will learn how to use the internal rhythms of these versicles to determine your own musical settings.

A SHORT HISTORY OF PSALMODY

The psalms were a central part of the Jewish religious training Jesus received in his youth. He used them liberally in his teachings and quoted them with his last words on the cross. Three centuries after his death, the Desert Fathers and Mothers of early Christianity pursued spiritual perfection by chanting all one hundred and fifty psalms, from memory, an everyday practice that left little time for eating or sleeping.

Monasticism developed as these Christian hermits began founding religious communities in ancient Egypt, Judea, and Syria. The monastic model spread to western Europe, where political turmoil made it difficult for Christians to stabilize and standardize their spiritual practice. In response to this need, the Italian monk Benedict of Nursia (c.480–547) compiled the instructions that came to be known as the Rule of St. Benedict. The Rule, which

draws directly on oral and written traditions handed down from the Desert Fathers and Mothers, is the foundation for daily practice in many monastic communities today. It emphasizes a healthy balance of prayer, study, and manual work—with multiple chantings of the psalms at regular intervals every day to “tether” the mind in a beneficial spiritual disposition. Thirteen of the seventy-three chapters of Benedict’s Rule are devoted to psalmody, or the chanting of the psalms. He exhorted his followers to sing the psalms with fear (i.e. an attitude of awe toward God); wisely; in the presence of angels; and with the aspiration to bring the mind in harmony with the voice.

The structure Benedict proposed for daily prayer, scriptural readings, and psalmody is known as the Divine Office. It comprises one “night office,” known as *vigils*, and seven daily services (the number is drawn from Psalm 119: “Seven times a day have I praised you”). The services begin at sunrise with *lauds*. The other services are *prime*, *terce*, *sext*, *none*, *vespers*, and *compline*. Each service includes certain psalms—some always sung at that service, others varying from day to day. The Benedictine ideal calls for all one hundred and fifty psalms to be chanted each week.

THE TRADITION OF CHRISTIAN CHANT

Most mystical spiritual practices involve the use of chant. In the Eastern traditions, and in Sufism, words or syllables are chanted repetitively in order to facilitate a higher mental state. Christian chanting differs from these practices in that the intention of the practitioner and the meaning of the words are paramount. The mystical function of psalmody is to bring the chanter closer to the divine through an understanding of God's Word that lies beneath both the text and the rational mind.

The Desert Mothers and Fathers chanted the psalms with the aspiration to "become perfect, as the Father in heaven is perfect." (Perfection, in the earliest days of Christianity, was understood as meaning "to be whole": integrated in body, mind, and spirit.) This intention is at the heart of psalmody. With repeated chanting, the practitioner identifies with the psalmist's spiritual aspiration—and frustration—and is able to experience it more spontaneously in everyday situations. Because the psalms contain "all the emotional states known to humanity" (as one Desert Father put it), they can become powerful psychological tools when integrated into one's deeper self through the regular practice of psalmody combined with contemplative prayer or meditation.

HOW TO SING THE PSALMS

Always begin your contemplative practice sessions with silent prayer. This will help you bring your mind and body together in the present—the only place where genuine communication with the divine can take place.

The psalms themselves are best sung straightforwardly, without flourishes or vibrato. On *Singing the Psalms*, you will hear examples of a simple “step up, step down” melodic structure that is designed to help you focus on the meaning of the words without unnecessary musical distractions. There is no “correct” musical setting for any given psalm. You are encouraged to attune yourself to the natural rhythm of each versicle (half-verse) to find the appropriate places to raise and lower the melodic pitch. This rhythm is easy to find when you speak the versicle out loud and hear its conversational inflections.

In singing the psalms, it is helpful to bring your attention to four areas of your experience:

- ✿ *tone*—the clarity of your singing
- ✿ *breath*—the literal inspiration present in your body
- ✿ *emotion*—consciousness of the meaning of the psalms and your own intention

- ✿ *community*—awareness of your neighbors
(if you are singing in a group setting)

USING ANTIPHONS

Antiphons are the “bread” you place on either side of the psalm to create a “psalm sandwich.” They may be scriptural verses or fragments of writing drawn from inspirational poetry or prose. Antiphons can serve three important functions:

- ✿ to add Christian perspective through the use of New Testament verses
- ✿ to create a seasonal context by using verses related to the liturgical calendar
- ✿ to make your chanting more personally meaningful to you through the use of verses you find especially inspiring

Use the antiphon of your choice—or compose some of your own—to begin and end the chanting of any psalm. The suggested “psalm sandwiches” that follow offer examples of antiphons and show how to place them before and after the psalm itself.

THE DOXOLOGY

Christians have added a further piece to the psalm chanting structure. The word “doxology” is based on a Greek word meaning “to give praise.” Its function is to ground your contemplative practice in intention. The doxology is chanted immediately after the psalm, just before the final anti-phon, using the tune of the psalm setting. Unless otherwise noted, the wording of the doxology used on *Singing the Psalms* is: “Give praise to the Father Almighty, to his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, to the Spirit who dwells in our hearts, both now and forever; Amen.”

SOME RECOMMENDED CHANTS

The following psalms, antiphons, and other sacred songs are intended to help you get started in your practice of singing the psalms. Use them as guides for your own services. The instructions and suggestions on *Singing the Psalms* will provide further guidance for developing your own antiphons, musical settings, and structures for contemplative practice.

Psalm 34

- 1 I will bless the Lord at all times; *
his praise shall ever be in my mouth.
- 2 I will glory in the Lord; *
let the humble hear and rejoice.
- 3 Proclaim with me the greatness of the Lord; *
let us exalt his name together.
- 4 I sought the Lord and he answered me *
and delivered me out of all my terror.
- 5 Look upon him and be radiant, *
and let not your faces be ashamed.
- 6 I called in my affliction and the Lord heard me *
and saved me from all my troubles.
- 7 The angel of the Lord encompasses those who fear him, *
and he will deliver them.
- 8 Taste and see that the Lord is good; *
happy are they who trust in him!
- 9 Fear the Lord, you that are his saints, *
for those who fear him lack nothing.
- 10 The young lions lack and suffer hunger, *
but those who seek the Lord lack nothing that is good.
- 11 Come, children, and listen to me; *
I will teach you the fear of the Lord.
- 12 Who among you loves life *
and desires long life to enjoy prosperity?
- 13 Keep your tongue from evil-speaking *
and your lips from lying words.
- 14 Turn from evil and do good; *
seek peace and pursue it.
- 15 The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, *
and his ears are open to their cry.
- 16 The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, *
to root out the remembrance of them from the earth.

- 17 The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them *
and delivers them from all their troubles.
- 18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted *
and will save those whose spirits are crushed.
- 19 Many are the troubles of the righteous, *
but the Lord will deliver him out of them all.
- 20 He will keep safe all his bones;
not one of them shall be broken.
- 21 Evil shall slay the wicked, *
and those who hate the righteous will be punished.
- 22 The Lord ransoms the life of his servants, *
and none will be punished who trust in him.



Psalm 130

- 1 Out of the depths have I called to you, O Lord;
Lord, hear my voice: *
let your ears consider well the voice of my supplication.
- 2 If you, Lord, were to note what is done amiss, *
O Lord, who could stand?
- 3 For there is forgiveness with you; *
therefore you shall be feared.
- 4 I wait for the Lord; my soul waits for him; *
in his word is my hope.
- 5 My soul waits for the Lord,
more than watchmen for the morning, *
more than watchmen for the morning.
- 6 O Israel, wait for the Lord, *
for with the Lord there is mercy;
- 7 With him there is plenteous redemption,
and he shall redeem Israel from all their sins.

Psalm 100



Shout with joy to the Lord, all you / lands.
Serve the Lord \ with gladness.
Come into his presence \ rejoicing.

Know that the Lord is / God.
He made us and we \ are his,
his own people, the sheep of \ his pasture.

Come into his gates, giving / thanks.
Enter his courts \ with praise.
Give thanks to him and bless \ his name.

Praise the Lord, for he is / good,
his love endures \ forever
his faithfulness from age \ to age.

Doxology:

Praise the Father for his merciful / love;
taste and see that the Lord \ is good;
give him praise in the Ho\ly Spirit.

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Psalm 63 (*verses 1-8*)

Antiphon



In the sha - dow of your wings I re-joyce, al - le - lu - jah!

Psalm setting



Odd lines *Even lines* *Last line only*

O God, my God, at dawn / I seek you,
for you my soul is thirsting, my flesh / is
longing,
like a dry and parched land longs \ for water.

I have gazed on you in / the holy place,
to behold your might and / your glory.
Better that life itself is / your love,
my lips will sing \ your praise.

So I shall bless you all my / life long,
lifting up my hands to invoke / your name;
my soul will be filled as with / rich feasting,
and my mouth will proclaim \ your praise.

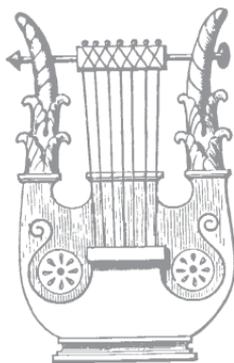
I remember you as I lie on / my bed,
on you I meditate through the watches of / the night,
for you, O God, have come \ to aid me.

I rejoice in the shadow of / your wings,
to you my soul has / held fast,
you have sustained me by your \ right hand.

Doxology:

In the Spirit of Christ / your Son,
the Church meditates on / your glory,
through the watches of \ the night.

Repeat antiphon



PSALMS FOR LAUDS OR A MINI-MORNING SERVICE

Psalm 100 (previous), Psalm 63 (previous), Psalm 92, the Benedictus

Psalm 92



It is good to give thanks to the / Lord,
to make music to your name, O Most / High,
to proclaim your love in the / morning
and your \ truth in the \ watches of the / night,
on the ten-stringed \ lyre and the \ lute,
with the \ murmuring \ sound of the /harp.

Your deeds, O Lord, have made me / glad;
for the work of your hands I shout with / joy.
O Lord, how great are your / works!
How \ deep are \ your de / signs!
The foolish \ cannot \ know this,
and the \ fool \cannot under / stand.

Though the wicked spring up like / grass
and all who do evil / thrive,
they are doomed to be eternally de/stroyed.
But \ you, Lord, are \ eternally on / high.
See how your \ enemies \ perish;
All \ doers of / evil / are / scattered.

To me you give the wild ox's / strength;
you anoint me with the purest / oil.
My eyes looked in triumph on my / foes;
My \ ears heard gladly of their / fall.
The just will / flourish like the palm \ tree,
and \ grow like a / Lebanon / cedar.

Planted in the house of the / Lord
they will flourish in the courts of our / God,
still bearing fruit when they are / old,
still full \ of \ sap, still / green,
to proclaim that the \ Lord is \ just.
In \ him, my / rock, there is no / wrong.

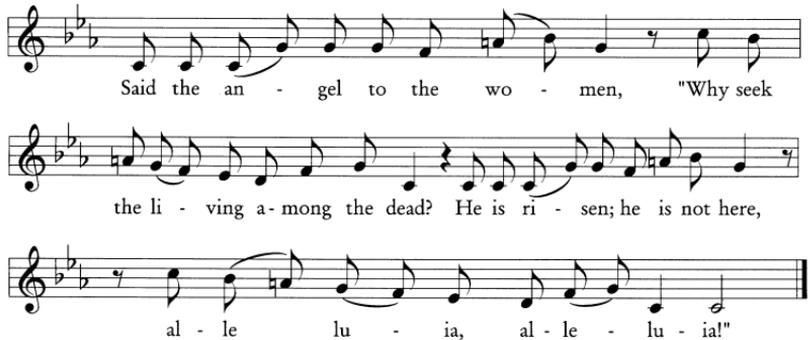
Doxology:

Give praise to the Father al/mighty,
to his Son, Jesus Christ, the / Lord,
to the Spirit who \ dwells in our \ hearts,
both \ now and for/ever; A/men.



The Benedictus

Easter antiphon



Said the an - gel to the wo - men, "Why seek
the li - ving a - mong the dead? He is ri - sen; he is not here,
al - le lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia!"

PSALMS FOR VESPERS OR A MINI-EVENING SERVICE

Incense Rite, Psalm 84, Psalm 137, the Magnificat

Incense Rite



Like in-cense let my prayer rise be-fore you, O God, the
lift - ing of my hands like an ev' - ning o - bla - tion.

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Come, let us sing for joy in Christ our God; let us praise him with all cre-



a - tion!

Repeat "Like incense..."

Psalm 84



How lovely is your \ dwell\ning / place,
Lord, \ God / of \ hosts.

My soul is long\ing \ and /yearning,
is yearning for the courts \ of / the \ Lord.
My heart and my soul ring / out / their / joy
to God, the \ liv\ing \ God.

The sparrow herself \ finds \ a / home,
and the swallow a nest \ for / her \ brood;
she lays her young / by / your / altars,
Lord of hosts, my King \ and /my \ God.

They are happy who dwell \ in \ your / house
forever sing\ing / your \ praise.
They are happy, whose strength / is / in / you,
in whose hearts are the \ roads / to \ Zion.

As they go through the \ Bit\ter / Valley
they make it a \ place / of \ springs.
They walk with ever- / grow\ing / strength,
they will see the God of \ gods / in \ Zion.

O Lord, God of hosts, \ hear \ my /prayer,
give ear, O \ God / of \ Jacob.
Turn your eyes, O / God / our / shield,
look on the face of \ your / a\nointed.

One day with \ in \ your / courts
is better than a \ thous/and \ elsewhere.
The threshold of the / house / of / God
I prefer to the dwellings \ of / the \ wicked.

For the Lord God is a ram \ part, \ a / shield;
he will give us his fav \ or / and \ glory.
The Lord will not refuse / a / ny / good
to those who walk \ with / out \ blame.

Lord \ God \ of / hosts,
happy are those who \ trust / in \ you!

Doxology:

Give praise to the Fath \ er \ al / mighty,
to his Son, Jesus \ Christ, / the \ Lord,
to the Spirit who dwells / in / our / hearts,
both now and for \ ever; / A \ men.



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Psalm 137

Refrain



In you a - lone, Je - ru - sa - lem, my joy!

The musical score consists of two staves in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The top staff is a vocal line with lyrics: "In you a - lone, Je - ru - sa - lem, my joy!". The bottom staff is a descant line with chords and eighth-note patterns.

Top line: Descant; Bottom line: Psalm setting



The musical score is a single staff in 4/4 time with a key signature of two flats. It features a descant consisting of eighth-note chords and single notes.

By the rivers of Babylon, / we sat and we wept,
as we / remembered Zion.

In you alone, Jerusalem, my joy!

Upon / the willows that grew there
/ we hung up our harps.

In you alone, Jerusalem, my joy!

There our captors / demanded a song,
our tormentors wanted / to hear us rejoice.

In you alone, Jerusalem, my joy!

They said, / "Come, sing us your songs,
as you used / to sing them in Zion!"

In you alone, Jerusalem, my joy!

How can we sing / a song of the Lord
here in / this land of exile?

In you alone, Jerusalem, my joy!

If I / forget you, Jerusalem,
let my / right hand move no more.

In you alone, Jerusalem, my joy!

Let my / tongue cleave to my mouth,
If I prize you not / above all my joys!

In you alone, Jerusalem, my joy!

Come, let us praise / the Lord, who has come
to dwell with us in / this land of exile.

In you alone, Jerusalem, my joy!

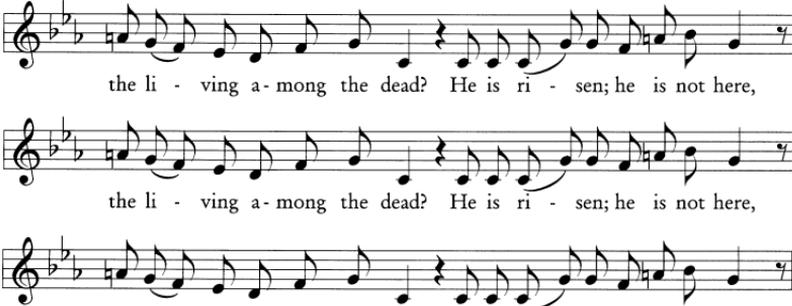
Both / the Spirit and the Bride
say "A / men! Come, Lord Jesus! "

In you alone, Jerusalem, my joy!

Repeat refrain

The Magnificat

Easter Antiphon



the li - ving a - mong the dead? He is ri - sen; he is not here,

the li - ving a - mong the dead? He is ri - sen; he is not here,

the li - ving a - mong the dead? He is ri - sen; he is not here,

The image shows three staves of musical notation in G-flat major (two flats) and 4/4 time. Each staff contains a melody line with lyrics underneath. The melody is a simple, rhythmic tune with a mix of quarter and eighth notes, and rests. The lyrics are: 'the li - ving a - mong the dead? He is ri - sen; he is not here,'. The first staff is followed by a line of lyrics, then the second staff is followed by a line of lyrics, and finally the third staff is followed by a line of lyrics.

Singing the Psalms 24

Setting for the Magnificat



My soul proclaims the greatness \ of the Lord,
my whole being finds joy in \ God my Savior.
He has looked on the lowliness \ of his servant:
all generations to come will / call me blessed.

For me has he \ done great deeds,
he, the mighty, whose \ name is holy.
His mercy is on all \ who revere him,
from one generation / to the next.

He has put forth his \ arm in strength
and thwarted the plans \ of the proud.
He has cast down the mighty \ from their thrones;
to high places he has \ raised the lowly.
With good things he has \ filled the hungry,
and sent away the rich / empty-handed.
He has upheld his \ servant Israel,
remembering the pro\mise of mercy
which he made to our people \ long ago:
for Abraham and his / seed for ever.

Doxology:

Give glory to \ God the Father:
he has fulfilled his pro\mise in Mary;
she gave birth to \ Christ our Savior
by the power of the / Holy Spirit.

Repeat antiphon

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Arakal, Joseph. *The Psalms in Inclusive Language*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Books, 1993.

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The Book of Common Prayer: According to the Use of the Episcopal Church. New York: Church Publishing, 1979.

The Grail Psalms. Chicago: G.I.A Publications, 1993. Phone: (708)496-3800.

The Psalter: Psalms of David from "The Book of Common Prayer." New York: Church Publishing, 1997.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The St. John's Psalm Singers, St. John's Episcopal Church, Boulder, Colorado:
Anne Greene, Deacon Patricia Laudisio, Stuart Naegele, and Bob Spelvin.

Sister Hildegarde, O.S.B. and the community at the Abbey of St. Walburga, for
their insight and witness to a life lived in the psalms.

Brother Cyprian Consiglio, O.S.B., Cam., composer and musicologist, New
Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur, California, for musical clarification.

Father Theophane, O.C.S.O. of St. Benedict's Monastery in Snowmass,
Colorado, for textual clarification.

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