

A SERVICE OF CHORAL EVENSONG

for THE FEAST OF ALL SAINTS

ABOUT THE SERVICE

Even though it is first and foremost a service of worship, music plays a leading role in a service of Choral Evensong. Evensong is one of the original services included by Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) in the first *Book of Common Prayer* in 1549. Cranmer essentially combined the monastic offices of Vespers and Compline into one service intended for the lay people who did not typically observe all of the monastic office services of the day (eight services at three hour intervals spanning the entire day from midnight to midnight). This service was modified several times in subsequent editions of the *Book of Common Prayer*, finally acquiring its final form with the prayerbook of 1662, which is still in use in the English church. It is that form of the service that we will experience this evening.

Our service this evening, as with much of life these days, is somewhat altered from what we normally do (some of the following description applies our normal service so some things are not quite the same). In place of the choir this evening we have four professional singers. Joseph Roberts and Jennifer Wobser, our baritone and mezzo-soprano section leaders, are familiar to you as they have been providing the music for our Sunday morning online services for more than eight months now. Joseph is in his eleventh year with us and Jennifer is in her second. Julia Engel is also likely familiar to many of you. She was our soprano section leader for nine years, “retiring” a little more than a year ago to spend more time with her family. The new face you will see is Brian Yeakley, who is our new tenor section leader. He is a superb singer that you will get to know better in the coming weeks. This is his first appearance with us.

Evensong could arguably be said to be the “most Anglican” of worship services, having been regularly said, or more often sung, in Anglican churches from the very beginning. Evensong is one of the services that can be done by lay people alone, without clergy, and can be done individually or in the largest of cathedral settings. It may seem strange linguistically, but there is such a thing as “Spoken Evensong” (usually just called “Evening Prayer”). There is also “Sung Evensong”, in

which the congregation sings portions of the service, and as this evening, “Choral Evensong”, in which the choir does the majority of the singing, the congregation joining for the hymns, the Creed, and the Lord’s Prayer. (For those who really like “fancy church”, there is even “Solemn Evensong”, which includes more pageantry and incense.)

Much of the service is a dialogue between a leader (a priest, precentor, or cantor) and the choir. The service begins with a hymn (which is exclusive to Sunday evensongs), followed by an exhortation to praise the Lord. After this the choir will sing one or more Psalms in Anglican Chant (another liturgical practice that “belongs” to the Anglican Church). We then proceed to two readings from the Scriptures. Each of these readings is followed by a Canticle sung by the choir. The first Canticle is the *Magnificat* — the Song of Mary, found in Luke 1:46-55. The second Canticle is the *Nunc dimittis* — the Song of Simeon, found in Luke 2:29-32. Despite the Latin titles, these will be sung in English.

After this, the entire congregation stands and sings the Apostle’s Creed on a single pitch. This may be a different experience for you, but it is easy and we urge you to join with the choir and lend your voice to this declaration of faith (tonight we will just recite it). We then move to the prayers — first the choir sings the *Kyrie eleison*, followed by the everyone singing the Lord’s Prayer (tonight speaking, as with the Creed). The choir and cantor then sing the *Preces and Responses* — a series of petitions going back to the first days of the Anglican Church — and several collects, which may be said or sung.

After this, the choir sings the anthem. In a typical English evensong, the anthem is a much larger piece than we typically have on Sunday morning, but in our online format tonight, it is much more of the scope of a Sunday morning anthem.

To bring the service to a close, there are a few more prayers and the Grace said or sung by the officiant, a congregational hymn and the organ postlude. Because this is considered very much a part of the service, you are urged to be seated following the hymn for the postlude.

If you would like to know more about Evensong, a very fine FAQ page from St. Paul’s Episcopal Church in Ivy, Virginia can be found at:
<http://stpaulsivy.org/music/choral-evensong-october-24/>