
About the Service

The daily services or “offices” of Morning and Evening Prayer have their roots in the worship of monastic communities in the middle ages, where monks and nuns chanted prayers at regular intervals throughout the day. These complicated services, sung entirely in Latin to elaborate Gregorian chant tunes, were not meant to be understood or participated in by lay people.

During the 16th century English Reformation a deliberate effort was made to simplify the Daily Office so that both clergy and laity could participate. In Archbishop Thomas Cranmer’s English-language prayer book of 1552, the eight daily monastic prayer services were reduced to two: Morning and Evening Prayer (often called Matins and Evensong). Both include a collection of fixed prayers and Biblical texts combined with cycles of readings from the Old and New Testaments. A portion of the Psalter is also read or chanted at every service in a recurring cycle. These services, often still read or sung using the magnificent language of the 1662 edition of the *Book of Common Prayer*, are conducted daily in Anglican churches around the world.

When characters in Barbara Pym novels speak of going to evensong, they usually mean a simple weekday service that is, paradoxically, not sung at all but rather read aloud by a priest or lay reader. *Choral* evensong, where the service is actually sung by a cantor and choir, was confined to British cathedrals and college chapels that had resident choirs of men and boys until the late 19th century, when it became widespread on Sundays in parish churches as well. Musical settings of the service have been devised by English composers since the Tudor era, and more recently by composers from the United States and elsewhere.


In Anglo-Catholic churches, the quintessentially English service of Evensong is often followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, a ceremony dating back to the 13th century which was specifically banned by the English Reformers (“The Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper was not by Christ’s ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped”) but which, like many ancient Roman Catholic practices, was reintroduced into the Anglican church by the 19th century “high church” Oxford Movement.

Mildred Lathbury in *Excellent Women* imagined her low-church mother with “her lips pursed, shaking her head and breathing in a frightened whisper, ‘*Incense.*’” Incense has been used in religious rites around the world for millennia, and is mentioned many times in the Hebrew scriptures, but in the Anglican church it is one of the traditional marks of a “high” church. It is used twice in this service: first, during the *Magnificat* the altar cross and altar and then the priest, acolytes, choir and congregation are censed, and later the Blessed Sacrament is censed during Benediction.

The Church of the Advent was founded in 1844, a mere eleven years after the birth of the Oxford Movement in England, and this building was built between 1878 and 1892 in an English Gothic Revival style that owes much to the work of William Butterfield, the architect of All Saints’ Margaret Street in London and Keble College, Oxford. The church contains outstanding stone and wood carvings and stained glass created by such English Arts and Crafts masters as Kempe, Clayton and Bell, and Christopher Whall; the Lady Chapel and Great Rood are the work of the great American Gothic Revival architect and designer Ralph Adams Cram.

Music has been an important part of worship at the Advent since its founding. The Choir of the Church of the Advent is a world-famous professional ensemble that sings for the Solemn Mass every Sunday and for other special services throughout the year. Tonight’s service is sung by the Parish Choir, an auditioned ensemble of devoted amateurs who sing for the 9:00 a.m. Mass every Sunday. The Advent’s Aeolian-Skinner organ (Opus 940, 1936) is one of the most celebrated church organs in North America. The company’s visionary tonal director, G. Donald Harrison, worked tirelessly to build a perfect instrument for this acoustically and aesthetically amazing building, and it changed the course of American organ building for the next 35 years.

Program Notes

he music at this service is drawn from a wide variety of sources, spanning several centuries. The organ prelude by Herbert Howells, one of the great English church musicians of the 20th century, makes reference to the great Tudor composer Thomas Tallis (1501-1585) and also recalls the influence of Ralph Vaughan Williams; Howells was present for the first performance of Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* in 1910, and both composers had a lifelong effect on him.

The music of the introit was published in London in 1553 by Dr. Christopher Tye, who was organist and choirmaster at Ely Cathedral from about 1543-1561. Like most Tudor church musicians, he wrote choral works both in English for the Protestants and in Latin during the reign of Queen Mary. This motet was originally in English; the Latin text sung tonight is a 19th century addition.

The opening hymn is the "Old 100th" psalm tune from the 1562 Scottish Psalter, as arranged by Ralph Vaughan Williams for the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1952. The reformers translated the Psalms from Latin into English verse so they would be easy for the people in the congregation to learn and to sing.

The Preces (Latin, "prayers") and Responses are settings of Cranmer's texts for Evening Prayer composed by Richard Ayleward (1626-1669), who was organist and choirmaster at Norwich Cathedral during the reign of Charles II.

The Canticles are two scriptural "songs" from the Gospel according to St Luke, the *Magnificat*, or Song of Mary, and *Nunc dimmittis*, or Song of Simeon. They are sung tonight to settings by the contemporary American composer Gary Davison (b. 1961). He is a graduate of Boston University and has served as organist and choirmaster at churches in Connecticut, Washington D.C., New York City, and Maryland, and is active as an organ recitalist and composer.

Barbara Pym novels are full of references to hymns, and "God moves in a mysterious way," written in 1774 by William Cowper, was her favorite – she wrote in her diary in 1943, "Hilary and I...began playing and singing hymns – and I remembered some things I'd forgotten, favourite bits and lines...and of course my dear old favourite 'God moves in a mysterious way'. But of *course* 'His purposes will ripen fast, Unfolding every hour, The bud may have a bitter taste, But sweet will be the flower...'" And it was Belinda Bede's favorite as well:

'Do not give it another thought, Miss Bede.' [Bishop Grote] said briskly. 'I assure you that *I* shall not. After all, we must remember that *God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.*'

'Yes, certainly,' agreed Belinda, feeling a little annoyed that he should quote her favourite hymn. But perhaps it was presumptuous to suppose that God would be more likely to reveal his ways to her than to the Bishop. She did not quite see how the lines applied here....

Tonight's anthem is a new setting of this text for choir and organ by composer Rodney Lister, which was commissioned by the Barbara Pym Society to mark the Pym centenary. Rodney Lister was educated at the New England Conservatory of Music and Brandeis University, and he also studied privately in England with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies and was a Bernstein fellow at Tanglewood. He is currently on the faculty of Boston University and the Preparatory School of the New England Conservatory. His more than 200 compositions include sacred and secular works for piano, voice, mixed chorus, and a wide variety of instrumental ensembles.

The final musical work tonight is Louis Vierne's *Carillon de Westminster*, composed in 1929 and based on the familiar Westminster clock chimes. Vierne was organist at the Cathedral of Notre-Dame in Paris from 1900 until 1937. He got his friend, English organ builder Henry Willis III, to hum the theme for him; the second quarter of Vierne's theme does not match the clock, and musicologists have debated for decades whether Willis hummed the tune incorrectly, or if Vierne transcribed it wrong, or if he altered the melody deliberately.