



40. What is a Canticle?

The expression 'canticle' is derived from a Latin word '*canticulum*' meaning, literally, 'little song'.

Liturgically, it denotes the texts derived from the Bible which are said or sung at Morning and Evening prayer – the Benedictus (Blessed be the Lord God of Israel) at Morning Prayer, and the Magnificat (My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord) and the Nunc Dimittis (Lord, now you let your servant go in peace) at Evening prayer.

These three are sometimes called the 'evangelical canticles', as they come from the Gospel of Luke, and they refer to the Incarnation of Christ, in whose honour congregations are expected to stand while they are being said or sung.

In the Roman Catholic Church, a further seven passages from the Old Testament and Apocrypha, varying according to the day of the week are said or sung at Lauds or Morning Prayer. An example is the Benedicite (O all you works of the Lord, bless the Lord). In recent Anglican revisions of the Daily Offices, other poetical passages from the Old and New Testaments and Apocrypha have been used as canticles, with varying degrees of success.

Psalms are not generally called canticles, nor are texts such as the Te Deum (We praise you O God) or the Gloria in Excelsis (Glory be to God on high) which are not Biblical and are properly hymns.