

Source notes on SILVER AWARD Section E1

Section E Choir in context

1. Bible

Candidates should show their **knowledge**, and be prepared to discuss the **biblical origins**, of any two of the following liturgical texts, as requested by the examiner:

Our Father, Holy holy holy, Lamb of God, Magnificat, Nunc dimittis.

Candidates should be able confidently to supply the information given in plain text below. *Italic text* indicates possible extensions, which may help candidates to gain some extra credit. Candidates are encouraged to develop their understanding a little beyond the basic answer. Examiners will be sensitive to the ‘tradition’ of each candidate, which may significantly affect the terminology they use, as well as the scriptural outlook underlying their answers.

Our Father

The **Lord’s Prayer**: the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, in answer to their request, ‘Lord, teach us how to pray’. It is found in the **Sermon on the Mount (Mt 6) and also in Lk 11**. We are encouraged to pray for basic material and spiritual help from God (‘Give us each day our daily bread’, ‘Do not bring us to the time of trial’) and to recognise that God’s forgiveness to us is dependent upon ours to others.

The traditional doxology, ‘For thine is the kingdom’, is not recorded in the Gospels but alludes to hymns of praise in other parts of NT (e.g., Rev 15).

The Kingdom of Heaven comes nearer if, daily, his disciples put Jesus’ prayer into practice.

Holy holy holy

The **Sanctus**: words spoken by the seraphim in praise of God, in **Isaiah’s** vision *in the year that King Uzziah died (Isa 6)*. It is used as a hymn of praise central to the **Eucharistic Prayer**, ending with the refrain ‘Hosanna in the highest’. *This may be followed by the Benedictus, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’ (refer to the shout of the crowds on Palm Sunday).*

Compare the song of the four living creatures in John the Divine’s vision of the last days (Rev 4).

Lamb of God

The **Agnus Dei**: originally spoken by John the Baptist about the saving work of Jesus (**Jn 1**) at the beginning of his ministry. *John is encouraging his own disciples to join Jesus in his work.*

The hymn is traditionally sung as the bread is broken before communion, (*the Fraction*), recalling that in his broken body Jesus ‘takes away the sin of the world’.

The words, as sung, form 3 stanzas, the first two ending ‘have mercy upon us’, and the third ‘grant us peace’. Musical settings of the opening stanzas are always restrained in feel, but Classical composers (e.g., Mozart) changed the mood decisively for ‘Dona nobis pacem’.

Magnificat

The **Song of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Lk 1)**. Mary was visiting her cousin Elizabeth, *already pregnant with a son whom we know to be John the Baptist*.

'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour...' *Mary has already accepted the commission of the angel (at the **Annunciation**) to be the mother of Jesus – 'let it be to me according to your word'*. Now in this **canticle**, Mary goes on to praise God's radical acts of redemption, especially to the benefit of the poor and down-trodden.

She also recalls that her son will fulfil the promise God made to Abraham and, through him, to all his descendants (Gen 22).

Composers have been inspired by these themes to write settings in moods varying from tender to triumphal.

Nunc dimittis

The **Song of Simeon**, an old man, coming into the Temple (**Lk 2**) *looking for the salvation of Israel. 'The Holy Spirit rested on him'*.

Mary and Joseph had brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. *This event is celebrated on 2 February and in some churches is called **Candlemas**.*

Simeon took Jesus in his arms, saying, 'Lord, now let your servant go in peace, for my eyes have seen your salvation...' *The text goes on to recognise that Jesus will be the 'light to lighten the Gentiles', so the festival appropriately concludes the **Epiphany** season.*

*The canticle was imported into Evensong, at the compilation of the Book of Common Prayer, from the Office of **Compline**, where it is still sung.*
