



Byzantine Chant I – Resurrectional Hymns Course Syllabus

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Class Times: Thursdays, 4:00-5:30
Term: Full Year
Cost: \$400
Target Grade Levels: 7+

Course Description:

Why do we sing in church? There are so many good and true answers to this question, one of which is that singing brings beauty into our services as a love offering to God. The ancient tradition of what we call Byzantine Chant in our services is designed to call its listeners into prayer while manifesting God’s beauty as the Kingdom of Heaven is incarnated in our worship space.

This course is designed for young people who are either brand new to Byzantine Chant or have some experience with it but want to have a better grasp of the modes. The course will attempt to follow the natural pedagogical approach of Byzantine Chant: it will start with trying to formulate a musical “image” of the eight modes in the students’ minds, so that any subsequent instruction in theory or notation will have a foundation upon which to be built.

This approach means the following about this course: we will not be learning Byzantine notation (a style of notation using relative pitch rather than writing notes on a staff), nor will we be learning very much theory about the modes. Instead, we will learn Fr. Seraphim Dedes’s English arrangements of the eight Apolytikia of the Resurrection from memory so that we have a model hymn for each mode. From there, we will be able to call to mind a model hymn for each mode, so that we can quickly “get into” each mode on command. Depending on the students’ progression in the course, we may also learn other hymns in each mode and/or get practice improvising hymns or verses in a given mode. We will use staff notation for any hymns that we learn.

Students who complete this course should be able to get the job done if they are alone chanting a service. They should also be well prepared should they choose to pursue a more thorough chanting education through private instruction or in classes, including those offered in the St. Raphael School curriculum.

Guiding Principles:

- Chanting is a love offering to God, in service to the congregation. Therefore, we who sing in Church ought to practice and put dedicated effort into learning, while trusting that God will receive our offering as we learn. We have faith that God will complete what is lacking in our offering and receive it as a sacrifice of love.
- As with most learning processes, the path to mastery (or even proficiency) comes through making mistakes and sounding bad. Therefore, our classroom will be our “laboratory” where we can experiment and make mistakes in front of each other. In order for this to happen, we will insist on a supportive classroom environment, and encourage students to take risks for the sake of our musical growth.

Course Materials:

An audio recording device is required for submitting assignments. All you need is something with which you can record yourself singing, and then email the recording as an audio file. Most phones are sufficient.

Prerequisites: An ability to read music is helpful but not required. Students who read music will be able to take more from the course, but all beginners are welcome!

Course Schedule/Content:

The schedule of the course will be flexible, determined by the level and progression of the students. So, rather than providing a week-to-week schedule, it will make more sense to go over the content of the weekly classes.

Classes will have three general parts, arranged and interspersed as the instructor sees fit. One is that we will rehearse the Resurrectional Apolytikion for that coming Sunday, with a goal toward memorization. By the end of the school year, the students should be able to sing all eight from memory.

A second part to the class will be education and practice on a certain mode. Our goal timeline is that we will focus on one mode each month, with the following schedule:

- September: Plagal Fourth
- October: First
- November: Plagal First
- December: Fourth
- January: Third
- February: Grave
- March: Plagal Second
- April: Second
- May: Catchup/Review

The third part of each class will be a teaching portion. We will learn about some of the basic concepts in Byzantine Chant, such as:

- Why and how we chant
- The versatility of modes
- Ison
- Heirmologic, Sticheric, and Papadic
- Basic Typikon/service structure

These concepts will be discussed in an introductory way. The goal for this course is not to master these concepts, but to lay a groundwork for deeper learning. This course should allow students to comfortably discuss these concepts with a mentor, or to be comfortable hearing about them in a subsequent class or lecture.

About the Instructor:

Paul Murray is a 2021 graduate of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, earning his Master of Divinity and Certificate in Byzantine Music. He has been chanting since the age of 10 at churches in the Antiochian and Greek Orthodox Archdioceses. He has studied under Fr. Romanos Karanos and briefly under Gabriel Cremeens. He has taught classes in Byzantine Chant at summer camps and other programs, and has given some private chanting lessons. He is currently the School Administrator of St. Herman of Alaska Christian School in Allston, MA, and serves as the Protopsaltis (lead chanter) of Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Newburyport, MA. He lives in Boston with his wife, Despina, who is also a chanter, and his 1-year old daughter, Photini.